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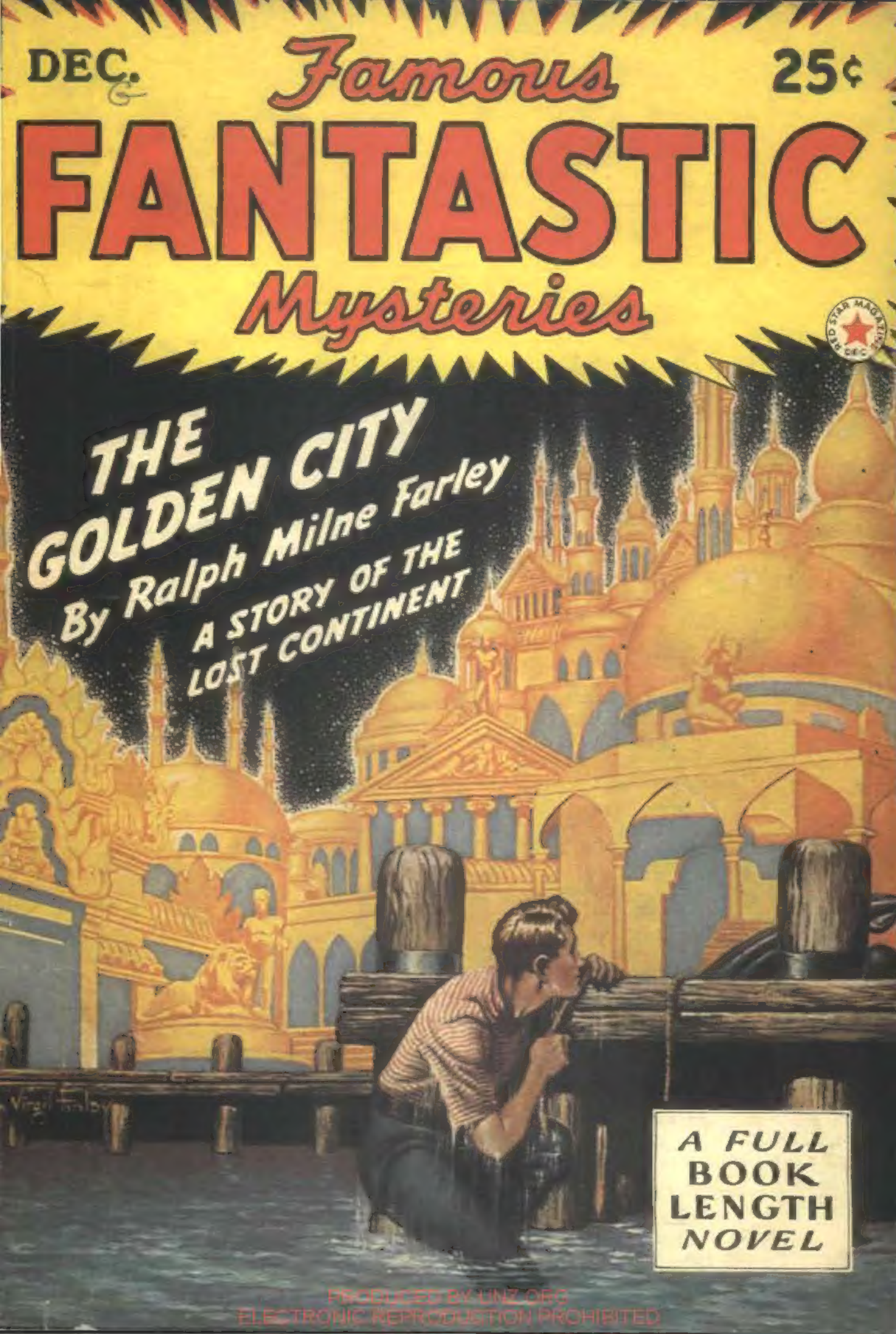

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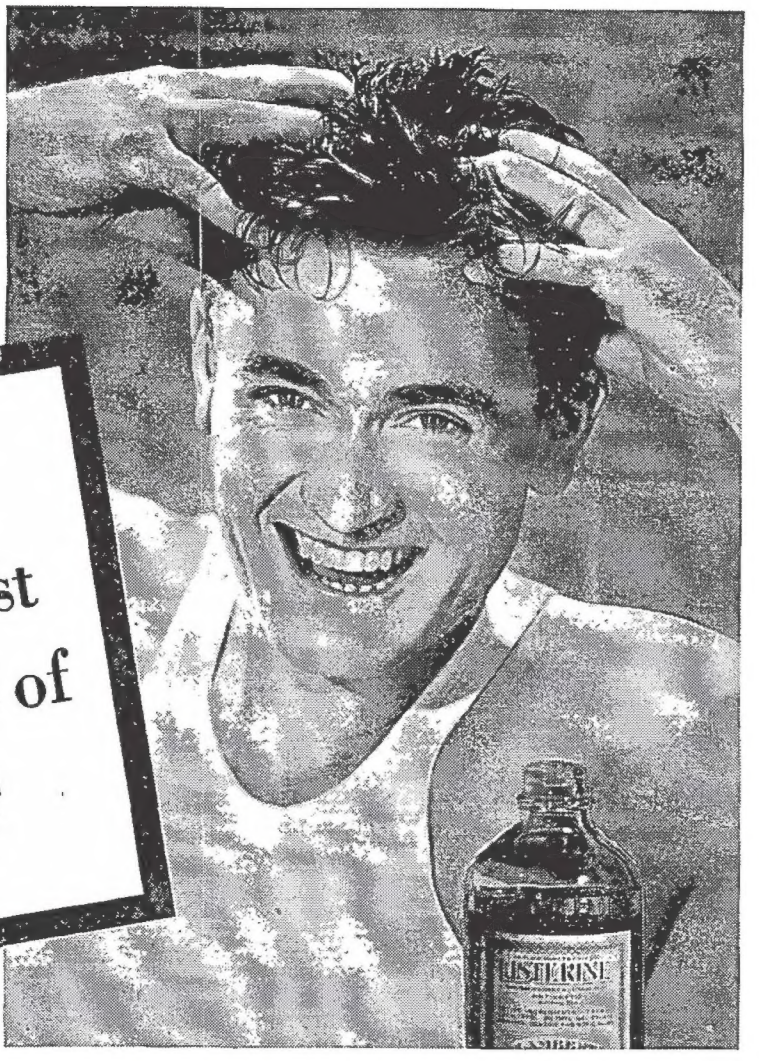

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Famous FANTASTIC Mysteries

(Combined with Fantastic Novels Magazine)

VOL. V | DECEMBER, 1942 | No. 2

Full Book-Length Novel

The Golden City — **Ralph Milne Farley** — 6

The lost continent of Mu! The story has often been told of how it exists unknown and uncharted in mid-Pacific, glimpsed by sailormen once in a century. But Adams Mayhew, lost overboard from a whaling barque, found himself at the shores of the mystic land, and began a strange adventure.

This story appeared originally in The Argosy, beginning May 13, 1933

Serial

Into the Infinite — **Part Three** — **Austin Hall** — 84

What was the occult mystery that held sway over the great dark castle? What had the strange happenings within its spacious medieval halls to do with that other greater enigma and strangest of all beings—the Rebel Soul?
Detective Wilkins, Walter Warren, and the Master of the Sevens have put forth all their skill and knowledge to solve the riddle.

Published serially in All-Story Weekly, April 12, 1919

Features

The Editor's Page — 83

Atlantis — *Verse* — **John James Meehan** — 82

To a Comet — *Verse* — **William Ross Lee** — 134

The Readers' Viewpoint — 136

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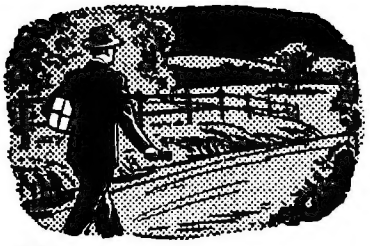
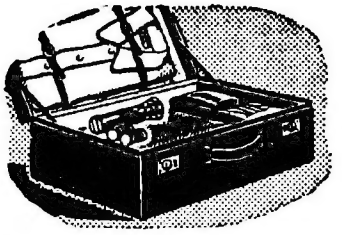
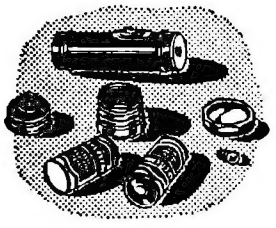


1 DON'T USE FLASHLIGHT CONTINUOUSLY. Snap it on when you *need* to see—then snap it off. *Needless* use of flashlight merely wastes "juice."



2 WHEN STARTING A TRIP, don't toss your flashlight *loaded* into your suitcase, haversack or toolbox. Unscrew, or remove batteries—then switch can't "catch" and waste batteries.

3 KEEP FLASHLIGHT OUT OF CHILDREN'S REACH. *It is not a* toy—but a tool for your convenience and safety. *Know* where it is at all times—so you can put your hand on it quickly when you *need* it.



4 DON'T THROW AWAY A BROKEN FLASHLIGHT until you're sure it can't be fixed. Minor repairs can quickly be made, lens or bulb may be replaced.

5 DON'T "HOARD" BATTERIES — keep one extra set for each flashlight in case of long-continued use. Others want and need batteries too. *Do your share* in conserving the nation's battery supply.

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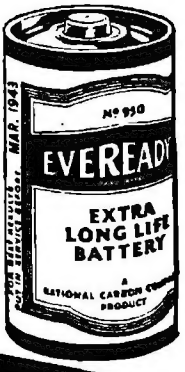

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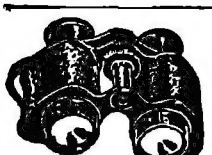

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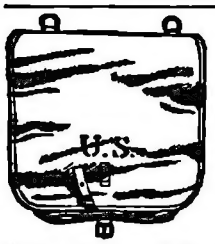

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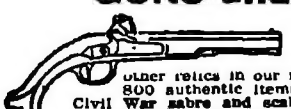

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"Once more this pearl of a white girl plays into our hands," announced the *Spider* maliciously

The Golden City

By Ralph Milne Farley

A Complete Novel

CHAPTER I

LOST AT SEA

IN MY scrap book of epoch-marking newspaper clippings, there is the following from the San Francisco *Chronicle* of Nov. 9, 1891:

STRANGE MIRAGE
SEEN BY WHALER

The harbor is literally strewn with whalers at anchor just now. There were several fresh arrivals chalked up today.

Late this evening the barque Alaska, of New Bedford, Mass., Captain Charles Fisher commanding, arrived with a splendid catch. She brought 1,400 barrels of oil and 17,000 pounds of bone, the product of thirteen whales.

Captain Fisher reported a successful cruise with no casualties. They were, however, becalmed for about a week in mid-Pacific. At this stage in his narrative to your reporter, a queer expression crossed the good captain's face, as he lowered his voice and said, "'Twas then that we saw the golden city." Whereupon he related the following tale:

Copyright 1933 by The Frank A. Munsey Company. This story appeared serially in The Argosy beginning May 13, 1933

Out of the swirling mists which rose from the magic bowl, there appeared the frightened image of Eleria

It was Adams Mayhew against the Spider, *mad genius of Mu—with the existence of that lost Pacific continent at stake*

On the sixth day of the calm, the Alaska gradually drifted into sight of an island, finally getting so close that a large city of Oriental architecture, with golden domes and spires and minarets, became visible. As the Alaska approached still closer, it was possible to make out the actual features of the people of the wharves. The men and the women wore striped blankets and sandals. Small boats with gaudy-colored sails lay at the wharves.

The Alaska came within a hundred yards of one of the boats. Captain Fisher hailed them, and blew his fog-horn, but they took no notice of him. Then suddenly the vision shivered, broke into pieces and disappeared.

Your reporter, fearing a hoax, separately interviewed at least a dozen members of the crew, and they all told identically the same story, even down to details as to the arrangement of the wharves and the principal streets and buildings, the rigging of the boats, and the costumes of the inhabitants. Either the crew of the Alaska actually saw the same vision, or they have been remarkably well coached.

There is no land charted within a thousand miles of where they saw the golden city, and no known actual city anywhere in the world fits their description of it.

This vision of "The Golden City" was a nine-days-wonder at the time, and it is still remembered and talked about by the sturdy men who sailed the seven seas in those good old days.

Often have I heard the yarn from my uncle, who was a member of the crew of the whaling barque Alaska when it encountered that mirage, or whatever it was. And it is from him that I obtained the above-quoted clipping.

But there was one phase to the episode which, by common agreement of all the crew of the Alaska, was kept from the newspaper reporters. And it is only in very recent years that my aged uncle vouchsafed this particular story even to me.

The suppressed item was this: One of the crew, Adams Mayhew by name, was sent aloft to get a better view of the strange land which the ship seemed to be approaching, and fell from a yardarm into the sea when the ship gave a sudden lurch as though it had grounded on a shoal. At that instant the golden city trembled, blurred and vanished; and when the crew of the Alaska, after rubbing their eyes and staring at the empty sea, lowered boats and hunted for their missing shipmate, he, too, appeared to have vanished.

The coincidence seemed so weird and uncanny to the superstitious mariners that they all agreed to say nothing about it. Mayhew was officially reported as having been lost overboard; but how and when was never detailed.

TO ME it never seemed that there was anything particularly exciting about the loss of Adams Mayhew. In fact I was much more impressed by the absolute inexplicability of a whole shipload of sober, God-fearing New England mariners simultaneously seeing, within easy hailing distance, identically the same mirage of a teeming city, the like of which existed nowhere on the whole surface of the earth! That, to me, was far more important than the fact that one of the crew had fallen overboard in the excitement and been drowned. And yet the awe and horror with which my uncle always spoke of the death of Adams Mayhew caused that episode to stick in my mind.

One day last summer, as I was hoeing asparagus in the field near the gate of my Chappaquiddick Island farm, a young man with broad shoulders, clear blue eyes and a firm step, and yet with an air of ineffable sadness, came striding down the road from town. He hailed me, and asked me if so-and-so (naming my uncle) lived thereabouts; so I pointed out my uncle's farmhouse, and the stranger strode on.

That evening, after supper and the chores, uncle dropped in on us, as he frequently did. Quite naturally I asked him if the visitor of that afternoon had found him.

"Aye," he replied, "and he tells a sea yarn that would make your hair stand on end."

Said I, "I've always minded to write a sea yarn, as you call it, a tale of whaling adventure, or some such. But from all accounts which you've ever given me, your whaling career must have been pretty humdrum; that is to say, except for the time you saw the vision of the golden city."

My uncle chuckled to himself, and his shrewd old eyes twinkled.

"All right," said he, "this here yarn, which I'm a-telling you, has to do with that golden city. For the caller I had this afternoon is Adams Mayhew, my lost shipmate."

"Well, what of it?" I countered. "There's nothing very exciting, is there, to his having been picked up by some other ship, and having kept it quiet from you folks for all these years?"

"Isn't there, though!" replied my uncle. "You see, Adams Mayhew wasn't picked up until just a few months ago."

"Absurd!" I retorted. "You don't mean to say that he has been floating around in the ocean all these years, do you?"

Then I remembered the apparent youthfulness of the man who had hailed me in the asparagus patch that afternoon, and I added, "Furthermore, this young man can't possibly be Adams Mayhew! Why, Mayhew would be nearly seventy, if he were alive today, and this man is still in his twenties."

Uncle's face sobered.

"Yes," he admitted, "that does make it seem a bit peculiar. But Adams claims that he has been gone less than two years. Oh, he's Mayhew, all right. Looks just like he used to, except a bit more filled out. And remembers things which only a member of the crew of the Alaska could possibly know."

"Now look here!" I interrupted. "More likely this is Adams Mayhew's son or grandson, if his name is Mayhew at all."

"Mebbe so, mebbe so," replied my uncle noncommittally. "Anyhow he's staying with me for several days, until he gets his bearings, sort of. Come on over to my house, and listen to his story."

So I did.

CHAPTER II

OVERBOARD

ADAMS MAYHEW'S own story tallies with the newspaper report of the vision of the golden city, as quoted above, and also with the whispered account of his having been sent into the tops with a telescope to get a better view of the lay of the land toward which the Alaska was slowly drifting over the hot and oily surface of the Pacific Ocean.

From his perch aloft, Mayhew could see considerably more of the city than from on deck. In the distant background there stood a smoking volcanic mountain. The city itself was certainly one of magnificent gilded buildings and great wealth. Gaily clothed men and women sauntered through its streets. Ornate barges, with gaudy striped triangular sails, were lading and unlading at its docks. Such a short distance away did it lie, and so clear was the air, that the young man could distinguish the individual features of the men and women on the nearest wharves. In fact, he even picked out, with his glass, one young girl as being prettier and more interesting looking than the rest. He hoped that Captain Fisher would dock there overnight, and give all the crew shore-leave.

With these thoughts in mind, Adams Mayhew craned his neck forward and adjusted his telescope to get a better view of the particularly attractive blonde, when suddenly it seemed as though the yard-arm, to which he clung, was abruptly jerked out from under him, precipitating him into the sea.

Mayhew was one of the younger generation of New Bedford whale-fishermen who had learned how to swim, an accomplishment scorned by his older shipmates. As he dropped through the air he came out of the sprawled position in which he had left his perch aloft, and straightened out to cut the water cleanly with his feet. He even had time to grab hold of his nose with one hand.

As a result of these precautions he was neither stunned nor choked, but he did go pretty deep into the sea. When at last, with sturdy strokes, he reached the surface again, he shook the dripping hair from his eyes and looked around for the Alaska. But the whaling vessel was nowhere to be seen. Adams Mayhew was alone in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

His first reaction was complete stupefaction and bewilderment, tinged with fear. Then a rational explanation suggested itself: some underwater cataclysm had suddenly destroyed the vessel with all on board, leaving him as the sole survivor. But this explanation wasn't so rational after all, for there had been hardly time for all this to have happened, but at least it was more sensible than to believe that the Alaska had vanished by sheer magic.

And what about the golden city? What had become of it? Mayhew knew perfectly well that the city had been only a mirage. His reason had told him this, even while he had been intently studying its apparent actuality.

Yet, strange to say, although the solid real Alaska had vanished, the mirage still persisted. What good could a phantom city do him in his present predicament?

In spite of a full realization of the futility of the attempt, and cursing himself for a credulous fool, he kicked off his shoes and set out hand over hand toward the nearest dock, which seemed not more than a hundred yards away.

Momentarily expecting the mirage to disappear as he approached it, he nevertheless kept on; and the mirage did not vanish.

When within a few feet of the wharf, Mayhew stopped swimming and surveyed the structure of piles which towered above him. Although he knew that it was a mere illusion, it certainly seemed real enough. Its cool shade felt soothing after his strenuous swim across the oily surface of the tropical sea. The ripples lapped hollowly at the foot of the timbers. Green seaweed, clinging just below the water-level, sudsed up and down with the gentle motion of the waves. Mayhew sadly shook his head. All he had to do was reach out his hand and touch some part of this mirage, in order to produce much the same effect on it as though it were a soap-bubble that he was touching.

THEN a sudden hope occurred to him: if he were to pierce the bubble of this mirage, would not that very act of destroying the unreal restore the real—the barque Alaska, which might not have sunk after all! At that thought, a panic seized him, a fear lest the Alaska might at that very moment be silently and invisibly drifting beyond his reach. All ideas of shore-leaves with beautiful golden-haired blue-eyed girls left him.

He thrust forward one rigid finger against the nearest pile of the wharf, as though poking at an iridescent film of soapy water.

But the fingertip jabbed painfully against solid wood! The wharf was real!

Adams Mayhew let out a howl of baffled surprise, which was instantly echoed by shouts from above. Glancing up, he saw, peering down over the edge of the wharf, the very unpleasant face of a young man of about his own age. It was weak chinned, thin lipped, sharp nosed, vicious, and shifty eyed.

For a moment the two men stared at each other. Mayhew's face registered hope, and the deference of one about to ask a favor. But the face above him registered first incredulity, then surprise, then fear, and finally a smug satisfaction.

It seemed as though the man thought he recognized Mayhew—as an enemy, a dangerous enemy—but now helpless, and in his clutches. But Mayhew's problem was to get out of the water. To flee might invite a shower of weapons, whereas to come up unarmed might for the present be the safest course.

So he shouted, "Please lower me a rope."

"Porto!" replied the ferret face. This strange word was followed by a string of utterly unintelligible syllables, in a very peremptory tone of voice. It sounded like a challenge and a threat; and yet there was a note of uncertainty, almost of dread, in it too.

"I'm sorry, but I can't understand you," said Mayhew. *"Parlez-vous Francais? Halbla usted Español? Sprechen sie Deutsch? Amenia sabe falar am Portuguez?"* Not that Mayhew could speak any of these languages, except Portugese; but merely that the answer might give him some clew as to the nationality of these strange people.

The eyes of the man above narrowed suspiciously. His face was withdrawn from view, and he could be heard shouting orders.

Then a rope-ladder was lowered over the side, and Mayhew clambered up with sailorly speed; and soon was standing dripping on the pier, clad in open-necked white shirt, sailor trousers and stockings, in the midst of an inquisitive throng, garbed in gayly striped togas. They seemed to know him—or to think that they knew him. Several of them addressed him, using that same word, "porto," which he had heard from the lips of the man who had looked at him over the edge of the wharf. But Mayhew did not know what to answer, and he merely stared back at them, bewildered.

The prevailing complexions were dark, though some were blond. Most of the men wore square-cut black beards at the tips of their chins, the rest of their faces being smoothly shaven; but some of the younger men had no beards at all. The women all wore their hair in long conical psyche-knots, and wore high waisted Empire gowns, with short puffed sleeves and ruffled skirt bottoms. Both sexes had sandalled feet, and arms covered with golden bands set with jewels and semi-precious stones.

Around the outskirts of the crowd there hung men, and a few women, of the black, brown and yellow races. Their clothes were simpler and more revealing, and the blacks of both sexes wore nothing above the waist.

Directly confronting Mayhew in the midst of the semi-circle of inquisitive humanity which hemmed him in stood the ferret-faced young man, flanked by two Negro henchmen. Although evidently of the prevailing race, he was clad quite differently from the others. Instead of an awning-striped, ground-sweeping toga, draped across the left shoulder, leaving the right arm bare, he wore a simple white, blue-bordered tunic, reaching only to the knees, and gathered in at the waist with a belt from which hung a pouch and a short broad-sword. His cropped curly black hair was bound by a flue fillet.

To do him credit, his face was the only unpleasant part of him, for his body was beautifully proportioned: slim-hipped and broad-shouldered. Mayhew instinctively sized him up, taking mental stock of his own sturdy muscles, toughened by two years of strenuous whale-fishing.

For several minutes the two men surveyed each other. Mayhew endeavoring to appear conciliatory, as befitted a foreigner in a strange land, yet on the alert to defend himself if necessary; his opponent with a truculent sneer on his unprepossessing features. In the background could be heard the murmuring voices of the crowd and occasionally the word "porto."

Then the man repeated to Mayhew the string of unintelligible syllables which he had put to him before. Again Mayhew

detected the undercurrent of fear and uncertainty in the man's tone. He appeared to be trying to impress upon Mayhew the fact that Mayhew was at his mercy, and at the same time to get an answer to some question which seemed to be puzzling him.

Mayhew, forgetting that he was among strangers, and for the moment seeing only the single individual who confronted him, blurted out, "I don't know what you're saying, but I don't like your tone of voice."

Evidently the ferret-faced young man didn't like the tone of Mayhew's voice either. The strange sound of the English language puzzled him, but he quite evidently knew that he was being talked back to. His half-timid, half truculent sneer changed to a scowl of sudden resolution.

Pointing a peremptory finger at Mayhew, he shouted a brief command to the two Negroes. The Negroes converged warily toward Mayhew, each drawing a long scimitar from his waist. Murmurs of disapproval arose from the crowd. Mayhew wheeled and poised on the edge of the dock, preparatory to diving back into the safety of the more hospitable sea.

But he was stayed by the sound of a feminine voice behind him, the most tinkling silvery voice he had ever heard. He gave a swift glance over one shoulder, hoping to catch a glimpse of the face that went with that voice.

It was the golden-haired girl whom he had picked out from the masthead of the Alaska! She had pushed through the crowd and had laid one dainty hand on the arm of her young countryman, and was remonstrating with him. Then she turned and smiled and nodded to Mayhew. The two blacks had ceased their advance and were looking to their master for further instructions. So Mayhew did not dive.

But the young man in the blue-edged tunic was in no mood to be remonstrated with, even by such a pretty and attractive girl. Seizing her hand, he flung it from him with a snarl. The girl stumbled backward into the crowd, with a hurt, bewildered look on her cameo face. Then the young man shouted a curt order to his two minions, and they advanced a second time.

But Mayhew's Yankee chivalry caused him to be filled with rage at the rough treatment which the ferret-faced young man had accorded the girl. With one leap he passed between the advancing blacks and landed on their master. His attack was so unexpected that the man had no time to draw his sword, and the two of them went down together on the wharf.

MAYHEW tried to get his hands around the other's throat, but he was cast off. Both men scrambled to their feet. Stooped low, their arms bowed, their fingers spread, they faced each other. Although Mayhew was not quite so strongly built as his opponent, he was no weakling, and catch-as-catch-can fighting had been a daily sport on the Alaska.

Mayhew, intently watching his opponent's face, noted that the man was looking past and beyond him. Sensing danger from behind, he wheeled just in time to see one of the two Negroes in the act of swinging a scimitar down on his unprotected head.

There was no time, and hardly room, to sidestep. To retreat would mean to throw himself into the clutches of the young man with whom he had been fighting. So, with a shout, which momentarily delayed the stroke of the Negro, Mayhew sprang straight at him, beneath the descending blade, and drove his fist with all his force into his bare solar-plexus.

With an agonized grunt the huge black collapsed writhing, his weapon clattering harmlessly to the boards behind its intended victim.

Spinning rapidly around, Mayhew snatched it up and faced the other Negro, who, having seen what had just happened to his mate, had paused irresolute. For a moment they faced each other until finally the black dropped his eyes.

The American took this opportunity to glance quickly around to see what his two other opponents were doing. But too late. For a white arm suddenly shot around his throat from behind, and at the same instant his right wrist was seized by fingers of steel. The sword fell from his nerveless hand. Then a voice by his ear shouted to the Negro to come on.

The black hesitated, however. Mayhew struggled and wrenched, whereupon a knee was placed in the small of his back and the arm across his throat tightened, cutting off his wind.

But a man's voice, a cultured voice,

with a ring of authority in it snapped out a sharp command from somewhere near by. Mayhew's opponent muttered something which sounded very much like an oath. The Negro shrugged his shoulders, lowered his blade, and thrust it back into his sash.

Relieved of this menace, Mayhew felt a thrill of exultation. With a sudden accession of strength he twisted around to face his assailant.

His right wrist was still held, and his opponent's left arm was still around his neck, but now it was against the back of his neck, no longer cutting off his wind. He drew in a deep, tortured breath, then drove his left fist straight up at the other's chin.

The jolt separated them. Mayhew wrenched his right hand free. And then, instead of following up his advantage with a right-handed punch, some imp of perverse humor led him to deliver a resounding slap to his opponent's cheek.

Several snickers were heard in the crowd. The ferret face went purple with mortification and rage. The veins stood out on his neck, and with a bellow he charged Mayhew. Mayhew leaped to meet him, and they crashed together and went down once more in a heap.

Several times they rolled over and over, the crowd making way for them. Then Mayhew got his fingers on his opponent's throat, and wriggled astride the man's waist. The man made one frantic effort to push Mayhew away, then with a sudden movement reached for his sword. He got his hand on its hilt, but Mayhew set his knee on the man's wrist, and held off the menace for a moment, meanwhile tightening the clutch of his hands. But the prostrate man was frantic. Slowly he withdrew the blade in spite of Mayhew's knee.

Again the authoritative voice in the crowd boomed forth a command. Mayhew shifted his glance from the man below him to the man who had spoken. The latter was tall, slim, wiry and dark, about fifty years old. An attractive face with a small square black beard at the point of his chin. He wore the prevailing gaudily striped toga.

As Mayhew glanced up, he released one hand from his victim's throat, to ward off the expected stroke from the sword. This gave his opponent just enough leeway. Letting go of his sword, he freed his throat with a thrust of both arms. Then he clutched at Mayhew's throat.

Mayhew threw himself backward to avoid this new attack, whereupon the other wriggled free. Both contestants scrambled to their feet.

For the second time they confronted each other. Both were now panting heavily, and the perspiration was streaming down their faces. As they faced each other thus, the kindly black-bearded man in the crowd stepped forward with a reproving: "Kataka, Kirio," and retrieved the sword.

Mayhew's opponent merely snarled in reply. Then he and Mayhew were at each other again.

This time it was his hands that found Mayhew's throat. And when they fell to the planking together, Mayhew was beneath, with the other sitting securely astride his waist.

Gradually the full realization dawned on the American that there was a real hatred back of this fight. This man evidently thought he recognized Mayhew as some old enemy, some enemy unexpectedly reappeared. What had begun as Mayhew's mere impulsive resentment at the ungentlemanly conduct of the man in the blue-edged tunic, had now developed into a battle to the death.

CHAPTER III

THE "SPIDER"

STRIVE as he would, Mayhew could not cast his opponent off, nor free his throat from those mighty hands, nor writhe from beneath the body which sat astride him.

The grip on his throat tightened. The evil face leered down at him, through a growing haze.

Then Mayhew's struggles ceased, and his body went limp. The ferret-faced man drew himself up more erect and swept the crowd with a glance of triumph.

But Mayhew had intentionally gone limp a few seconds in advance of actually passing out. Now with every last ounce of strength that was left in him, he suddenly heaved up one of his legs and hooked it cross the other's face. Then a push with the leg, and his throat was free, as his opponent was forced back and away from him.

For a few moments the man was held thus, until Mayhew got his wind back. But the other, quickly recovering from his surprise, squirmed out from under the leg which held him, and Mayhew,

realizing that this move would bring his opponent back on top of him again, threw himself free and sprang to his feet. Up came the other almost simultaneously.

But as the man braced himself for a third charge, Mayhew changed his tactics, and not waiting to get into a wrestling position, leaped in and drove his right fist to the other's jaw.

Down went the man, his skull crashing against the planking as he fell.

Standing astride his prostrate body, Mayhew waited, with clenched fists, for him to rise again.

But all the fight had been knocked out of the man. He opened his eyes, ran one hand bewilderedly across his forehead, then he looked up appealingly at his conqueror.

"Katango," he moaned.

"I suppose that means 'enough' in your language," replied Adams Mayhew, with the trace of a smile on his lips. "Get up!"

Then, suddenly realizing that he was in a foreign land, among strangers presumably hostile, he backed away from the prostrate body, and surveyed the surrounding crowd, alertly and vigilantly. As he cast his eye over the throng, he saw the face of the beautiful yellow-haired girl who had gotten him into this trouble. She smiled at him, and he grinned back at her. By her side there stood the handsome bearded man who had befriended him.

This person stared at Mayhew long and steadily. Then he bent down and whispered something to the girl. She gave a start of surprise, and her pretty face clouded as she replied. The two seemed to be arguing.

Then the bearded man stepped forward out of the surrounding crowd and, placing his right hand on the front of his own left shoulder, bowed slightly. Impelled by a natural politeness and gratitude, Mayhew returned the gesture.

"Tekuo kemel?" the man solicitously inquired.

But Mayhew shook his head.

"I'm sorry," he said, "I can't understand you."

The gentleman stroked his square-cut black beard with one hand, pursed up his lips, and gazed at Mayhew for a moment through narrowed lids. Then he smiled and held out one hand to Mayhew.

"Kom!" said he.

"Now you're talking," replied the young American, taking the proffered hand.

AS THEY were about to leave, the girl with the yellow curls stepped up to them with a sweet expression of friendliness and welcome in her blue eyes. She placed a slim, dainty, jeweled hand on the wet and begrimed sleeve of Mayhew's shirt and spoke to him in her tinkling silvery voice. Yet it was all in the strange language of these people. The only word which he recognized was "porto," and he still had not the slightest inkling as to the meaning of that word.

He flushed with embarrassment, cast one swift glance at the girl's lovely face, and then lowered his gaze and shifted his feet uneasily. The girl drew back her hand with a gesture of distaste.

The black-bearded man looked from one to the other of them, with pity and understanding in his kind eyes, nodded slightly, then pursed up his lips and shook his head.

"Kom. Porto!" said he, and there was a queer note, an intriguing tone to his deep voice as he spoke the word "porto."

Then this kindly gentleman and the American whom he had taken under his protection began to move away.

The crowd parted to let them pass, and now began to break up. But as Mayhew was leaving with his new friend he glanced around to see what had become of the pretty girl and of his late enemy.

The latter had arisen and was brushing himself off, and smoothing his rumpled tunic. And, to Mayhew's disgust and annoyance, the girl was standing very close to the fellow, talking to him solicitously; almost ostentatiously, it seemed.

Then the black-bearded man led Mayhew through the crowd, and along the wharf. Mayhew felt ill at ease, and very dirty and conspicuous.

At the shore end of the wharf was a stone-paved street, flanked by what appeared to be warehouses. Along this street they passed. No vehicles or beasts of burden were in evidence, but there were large numbers of gayly garbed persons of both sexes and of various races, many of whom stopped to stare at Mayhew as he went by. Some plucked the sleeves of their companions, and even rudely pointed at Mayhew. There were whispered conversations and some laughter, all evidently directed at their strange

visitor. Mayhew felt more and more conspicuous and uncomfortable.

Many of these people appeared to be acquaintances of his host, for they greeted that individual with the gesture of the right arm diagonally across the chest, with right hand on left shoulder. To these, the black-bearded man courteously returned the salute. Some even presumed to shout some evidently ribald comment, but these the man silenced with a frown and a peremptory shake of his head. And occasionally the intriguing word "porto" was used; but this seemed to displease the man.

Such was the courtly and assured bearing of his new friend, Mayhew soon got over his embarrassment and timidity, until finally he held his head proudly erect—despite his strange and dripping garments—and strode along beside his host as an equal. The man, noticing this, smiled and nodded approval.

Thus they passed on, up the street of the warehouses, until they came to a large public square, around which were grouped ornate and towering buildings of carved marble, chased with gold, and capped with domes and towers and minarets all tiled with that precious metal. Mayhew forgot the staring multitudes and his own uncouth appearance in his awe and wonder at the scene.

As the young American stood staring about, he suddenly noticed that something across the plaza had attracted the attention of his benefactor. A crowd was gathering in front of one of the buildings, an excited crowd, that gesticulated and pointed at something in their midst. Down the various streets, which converged at this public square, many people came running, to swell the crowd. And thither Mayhew's bearded friend now made his stately way, followed by Mayhew.

As they reached the outskirts of the jostling throng, someone shouted: "Julo!" and the crowd made way for them. And so Mayhew was able to see what it was that had caused all this commotion. It was a bulletin board on the face of the building; and on the board was posted what appeared to be a handbill or notice, written or printed in characters resembling Egytian or Chinese. But the outstanding feature of this poster was its heading: a picture of a huge, fat, repulsive, black spider!

The moment the eyes of the bearded gentleman fell upon the poster his handsome face contracted into a scowl. As he read on his jaw became set and his hands clenched. Finally he wheeled around, and wrapping his toga majestically about him, he stalked out of the crowd like a thunder-cloud of wrath.

Of course, Mayhew hadn't the slightest idea what it was all about. The spider-heading on the poster had somehow cast a chill over him; but, beyond that, the poster had conveyed nothing. So, with a puzzled frown, he ran his fingers through his sandy hair and followed his patron across the public square.

The streets which radiated from this plaza were flanked with lesser buildings of much the same architectural style, and up one of these streets for several blocks the stately, bearded man continued his slow and dignified march, his face softening as he progressed. Finally he halted before a doorway a bit more elaborate and gold-encrusted than the rest.

"Ya," said he, indicating the place with a lordly wave of his hand, a slight inclination of the head, and a friendly showing of white teeth.

But suddenly he recoiled from the door and clutched his toga in front of his throat as he stared aghast at what he saw before him. Adams Mayhew looked at the door, to see what it could be that caused his friend this consternation.

It was a small piece of paper or parchment; and imprinted upon it was a black spider, exactly like the one at the top of the notice in the plaza. Only that, and nothing more.

Mayhew turned his glance from the spider to the face of his friend. It was ashen.

But as he looked, the man regained a measure of his composure. With a determined shake of the head he stepped forward, ripped the offending piece of paper from its place, tore it into little bits, and scattered them in the street.

Then, his face once more serene, he pointed to the scattered bits, placed his finger on his lips, and looked fixedly at Mayhew.

Mayhew nodded. He understood the gesture of silence, even though everything else about the occurrence had been a mystery to him.

His host, satisfied, rapped three times with a golden knocker which hung from one of a pair of carved, golden doors. The doors swung open at the sound,

and two black men, naked to the waist, bowed low within the entrance.

With a slight inclination of the head, the man bade Mayhew enter.

THE doorway led into a spacious, golden-pillared hall, down which there approached a young-faced, though white-haired, woman in a maroon gown.

Her face wore a puzzled expression as she drew near, and she uttered an explanation coupled with that mysterious word, "porto."

But her husband—for it was evident that she was the wife of the man with the small black beard—hurriedly spoke several sentences, which were evidently some sort of an explanation relating to Adams Mayhew. She paused, clasped her hands with an involuntary little gesture, wrinkled up her forehead, and said:

"Oh!"

But what she had thought, or what was the purport of the man's explanation, or what she thought now, Mayhew could not even guess.

On the chance that it was the correct thing to do, he placed his right forearm diagonally across his chest and bowed low.

Then her husband, with a word of excuse to Mayhew, drew her aside for a moment, and they conversed together in low tones. At the conclusion of their conference, they turned their guest over to one of the black male servants, who —grinning broadly—led Mayhew away.

Down the ornate hallway they passed, into a flower-filled court, and thence by an outdoor staircase to a second story balcony, and what evidently was a sleeping apartment. Here the black man signaled to Mayhew to remain, and then withdrew. Mayhew sat down gingerly on the edge of a gaudy divan.

Soon the black servant returned, bearing a kimono-like robe of flowered crêpe material which he handed to Mayhew, who slipped off his dripping sailor clothes and put on the gaudy bath-wrap.

Then the Negro led him to a large room of glazed figured tiles, depicting scenes evidently of the golden city and the surrounding country. In the background of one of the pictures, the volcano which Mayhew had seen from the Alaska hung ominous and menacing, surmounted by a black pall of smoke. Somehow it fascinated the young American. The shape of the mass of smoke was vaguely reminiscent of the sign of the spider which had caused so much excitement that afternoon.

In the middle of the tiled room there was a sunken swimming pool, and along the walls there were marble benches, and cubicles containing showers.

The young whaler had never seen either a shower bath or a swimming pool; but his attendant, with a very puzzled expression on his shiny ebony face, demonstrated their use.

On his return to his own room, Mayhew found that during his absence his wet and dirty clothes had been removed. On the couch lay a blue and white striped toga, a sleeveless undershirt, a strip of white cheese-cloth, several feet of blue ribbon, and some jeweled bracelets and armlets and clasp-pins. Mayhew put on the undershirt, and the Negro showed him how to wrap the white cloth around his waist to form a crude undergarment, how to don the striped toga, and how to tie the fillet in his hair. He rebelled somewhat at the fillet, and positively refused the ornate jewelry.

When finally dressed, he surveyed himself in a mirror, and was surprised to see how completely he looked a native of these parts. Then his attendant led him back to his host and hostess.

Both of them gave a start of surprise as he entered, and Marta, as her husband called the woman, could be heard to whisper: "Porto?" inquiringly to her husband. But the man shook his head with an amused and quizzical smile, and advanced to greet Mayhew with extended hand.

Then the host led the guest into a small adjoining room, in one corner of which there stood a large globe of the world, mounted on a tripod. Here at last was something which might furnish the key to all these mysteries! With a glad "Ah!" Mayhew stepped over to it.

But it bore no map of the earth like any he had ever seen before. True, there were continents which vaguely resembled North and South America, Europe, Asia, Africa and Australia. But the Gulf of Mexico extended northward in a narrow V until it joined the Great Lakes, and there was a second group of lakes apparently in the midst of the Rockies. Siberia was connected to Alaska by a narrow band of land. The Mediterranean Sea was an inland lake. A large island lay in the south Atlantic, almost touching the northern tip of Africa. And the Pacific was filled with three parallel,

almost adjacent continents, stretching from east to west.

CHAPTER IV

THE LOST CONTINENT

THIS was not the earth! It was some travesty on the earth. Perhaps a strange planet! Mayhew rubbed his eyes and brushed his hand across his troubled forehead.

Then he swept his arm around him to indicate the surrounding city and pointed to the globe. His host instantly caught his meaning, and indicated the northeastern corner of the northerly one of the three Pacific continents. Mayhew studied the location. Yes, that would be just about the latitude and longitude of the Alaska when he was last aboard her.

He pointed to the island which lay in mid-Atlantic.

"Atlantis," replied his host.

Mayhew had never heard of any such place.

So he pointed inquiringly to the land of his present location.

"Mu," replied his host. "Ra Mu. Uluumil Ra."

Quite a mouthful! Mayhew could not be sure how much of that was the name of the place, and how much was description or explanation.

South America, the man designated as "Xibalba." But as to North America, he shook his head and shrugged his shoulders; apparently the place had no name.

Then Mayhew pointed to himself and to the north Atlantic seacoast, but his host shook his head incredulously. Apparently it was inconceivable to him that any one could live on the continent that had no name.

Their geographical conference was interrupted by the entrance of one of the Negro servants with a message for Mayhew's host, who at once left the room, signaling to his guest to follow him.

In the great hallway there stood the beautiful girl of that afternoon's encounter on the pier, now in earnest conversation with the hostess. As Mayhew entered with his host, the girl looked up, gave a start and blushed, then held her head high and turned away.

Mayhew put his arm diagonally across his chest and bowed to the two ladies. But the girl ignored him. Instead of looking at Mayhew, she turned to the host, addressed him as "Julo," and in an undertone asked him a question which included that ever-present word "porto."

But Julo shook his black-bearded head, and his eyes twinkled mischievously.

"No, Eleria," he said, then spoke a string of unintelligible syllables.

The girl and he disputed for several minutes. Then she bade good-by to Julo and Marta, and left without even a glance at the luckless Adams Mayhew.

She had been gone only a few minutes, when there was a commotion at the door, and the ferret-faced young man Mayhew had fought that afternoon at the wharves forced his way in at the head of a squad of rough looking individuals, garbed like him in blue-bordered tunics, and like him armed with broadswords.

As the leader of the intruders saw Mayhew he stopped, and his jaw dropped with surprise at Mayhew's new clothes.

Then, pointing his finger, he shouted, "Porto!" and sprang forward, followed by his men.

But Julo, the host, stepped between them. Calmly and authoritatively, but with flashing eyes, he addressed the young centurion, until apologetically the latter withdrew at the head of his cohorts. But, as he left, he flashed a look of hate at Adams Mayhew, and shouted at him a string of words, ending in the mysterious epithet, "porto."

Not understanding what was said, Mayhew could merely shrug his shoulders, and make the Muian gesture of hand on shoulder, at his departing enemy. His gesture was met with a sneer. Then the man was gone.

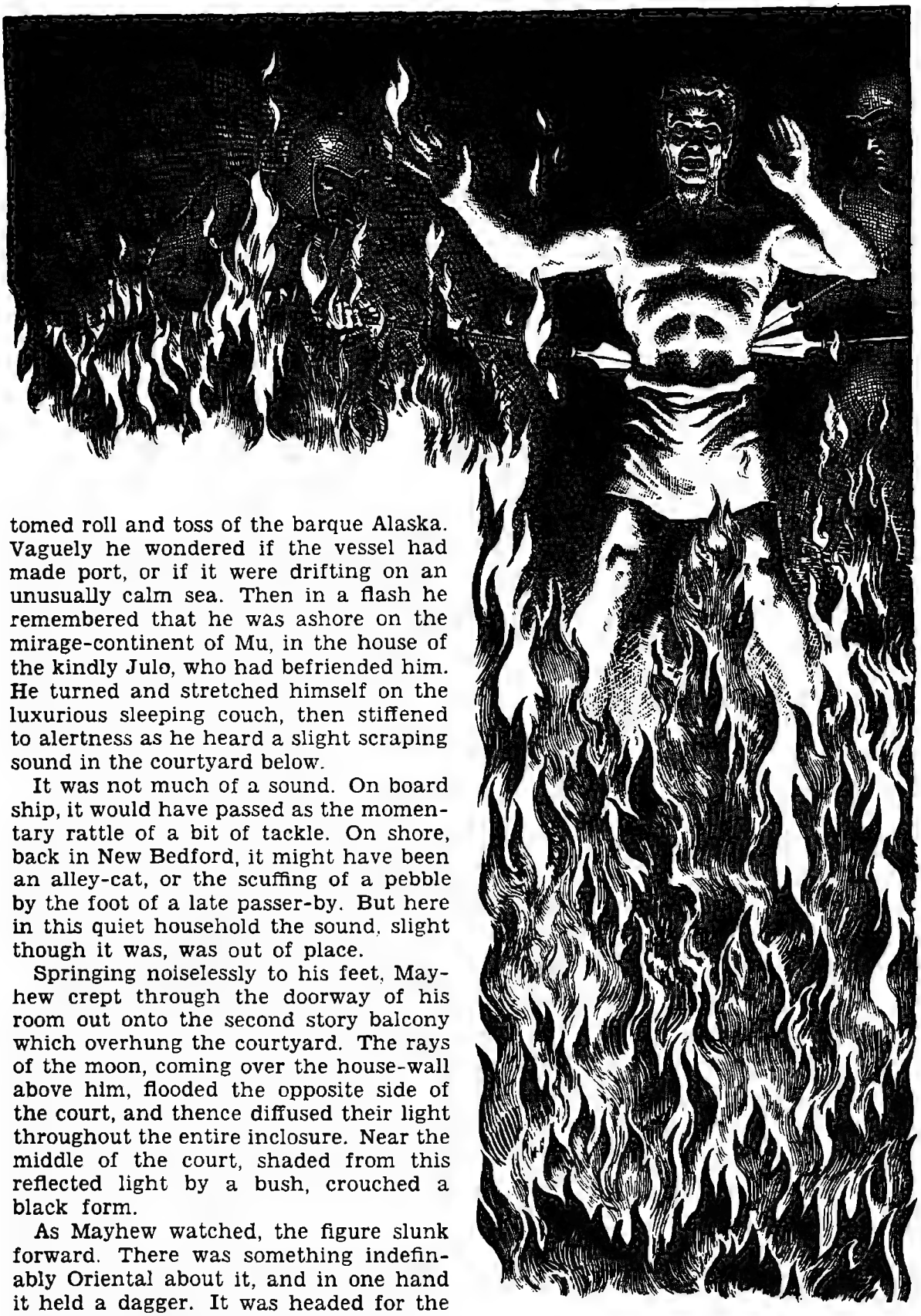
Julo turned on Mayhew with an expression of supreme contempt on his handsome aquiline face. It was the first look other than one of courteous gentlemanliness that he had ever given his guest. Then his expression softened and changed to understanding and mild amusement.

Dinner followed soon after, served in elaborate style from utensils of solid gold. Julo at once set about teaching Mayhew the language of Mu.

Finally Mayhew was escorted off to bed by the huge Negro who had been assigned to him. His host and hostess accompanied him as far as the courtyard and there bade him goodnight.

SLEEP came quickly to the tired young man. And as quickly came a sudden awakening in the middle of the night.

His first reaction was to miss the accus-



tomed roll and toss of the barque Alaska. Vaguely he wondered if the vessel had made port, or if it were drifting on an unusually calm sea. Then in a flash he remembered that he was ashore on the mirage-continent of Mu, in the house of the kindly Julo, who had befriended him. He turned and stretched himself on the luxurious sleeping couch, then stiffened to alertness as he heard a slight scraping sound in the courtyard below.

It was not much of a sound. On board ship, it would have passed as the momentary rattle of a bit of tackle. On shore, back in New Bedford, it might have been an alley-cat, or the scuffing of a pebble by the foot of a late passer-by. But here in this quiet household the sound, slight though it was, was out of place.

Springing noiselessly to his feet, Mayhew crept through the doorway of his room out onto the second story balcony which overhung the courtyard. The rays of the moon, coming over the house-wall above him, flooded the opposite side of the court, and thence diffused their light throughout the entire inclosure. Near the middle of the court, shaded from this reflected light by a bush, crouched a black form.

As Mayhew watched, the figure slunk forward. There was something indefinably Oriental about it, and in one hand it held a dagger. It was headed for the doorway through which Mayhew had seen his host and hostess withdraw after bidding him good-night.

His first impulse was to warn the household. But instantly he realized that the

Sometimes real flames would leap upward and lap the rock where Mayhew stood, driving him back against the sharp points of the spears behind him

only certain effect of a shout for help would be to put the prowler on his guard. Doubtless servants would come running, but the intruder was by now only a few paces from the door of Julo and Marta, and might easily be able to reach his victims before aid could arrive.

So, catlike, Mayhew raced around the balcony to a position just above the assassin, and then as silently clambered over the edge of the railing, and slid down one of the posts.

As his feet struck the ground, the man, with hand already on the latch of Julo's door, heard him and wheeled. Then the two of them launched themselves at each other.

Mayhew caught the wrist of the upraised dagger-arm of his adversary with both his own hands, and thrust his right elbow beneath the other's chin. A wrench of his powerful fingers, and the poniard clattered to the tiles. Then the other's free hand was at Mayhew's throat.

"Help!" shouted Mayhew. "Murder! Help!"

Although these words were in English, the tone of voice meant "help" in any language. Doors opened. Foot-steps sounded on the tiles of the court, and on the balcony above.

Then a cloud passed across the face of the moon, and the whole inclosure became suddenly and ominously dark.

Mayhew's assailant was jerked away from him by unseen hands. Other unseen hands seized Mayhew and pinioned his arms. Warm smelly human bodies engulfed him. And over all could be heard the babel of shouts in a strange tongue.

Then the clangor of a gong. Then lights. Mayhew suddenly found that he was no longer pinned down. He scrambled dazedly to his feet.

Silhouetted in the doorway of Julo's sleeping apartment stood Julo himself, with toga hastily draped across his shoulders, and a lantern in his hand. Six or eight huge Negroes stood about Mayhew, staring at him and at Julo and at each other, with surprise and confusion on their black features.

Julo snapped out a question. Several of the servants, with much shrugging of the shoulders, began to explain; but their master silenced them, and pointed a forefinger at Mayhew, with a sadly accusatory expression on his handsome face.

What could Mayhew say, not knowing more than a few words of the language! He could at least try signs and pantomine. So he pointed to the gallery by his own bedroom door, and then to himself. Julo nodded. Then Mayhew pointed to his own eyes, and to the center of the courtyard. Julo nodded again.

Then Mayhew pointed to the bush, by the side of which he had first seen the prowler; and, going over to it, crouched beside it, and began sneaking toward Julo's door. Julo stopped him with a peremptory gesture, and shot a question at the Negroes. But they shook their heads, and shrugged their shoulders.

Back toward Mayhew, Julo turned, with a frown on his handsome face, and moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue. But, just as he was about to speak there came a shout from the shadows in a far corner of the courtyard, and every one crowded over with lights to see what it was about.

It was the dead body of one of the Negro servants, lying on its back with a dagger through its heart! And, pinned to the breast by the weapon there was a piece of parchment bearing the sprawled figure of a loathsome black spider!

All stared at it for one long moment. Then Julo set down his lantern, walked over to Adams Mayhew, placed his left palm on the young man's shoulder and warmly shook his right hand.

Of the mob of assailants who had invaded Julo's house, there was not a sign, but for the rest of the night a Negro servant stood guard in the middle of the courtyard, and one slept in front of Julo's door, and one in front of Adams Mayhew's.

With daylight, the household took up its usual routine. Everything seemed so peaceful and serene that Mayhew began to doubt if the events of the night before had not been merely a dream.

His language lessons progressed, under the tutoring of his genial host and hostess. But when he sketched upon a piece of paper the rough figure of a spider, and asked the name for it, Marta clutched at her heart and hurriedly left the room; and Julo, with a sudden scowl, seized the paper and tore it into little bits. Mayhew apologized—in English, of course.

SHORTLY before noon Julo gathered his household together and led them from the house, he and Marta and Mayhew clad in brilliant togas, and the blacks naked to the waist, with baggy pantaloons, and scimitars in their sashes. An

air of alert tenseness pervaded the group, but they reached the public square without any untoward event.

Ascending the steps of one of the buildings with his retinue, Julo knocked on the door. It was opened by a white-bearded old man in a flowing yellow robe, with a flaming red swastika emblazoned upon its left breast. He and Julo exchanged a few sentences, and the party was admitted.

Never had Mayhew seen so much gold; the entire interior of the building was literally encrusted with it. The party passed through rooms of increasing brilliance, until they came out into a huge amphitheater. The whole was made of white marble, every inch of which was covered with ingeniously carved gold fretwork. Around the walls ran tier after tier of marble seats, surmounted by a canopy of fluted gold, supported on spiral golden pillars. But beyond this canopy the room had no roof, being completely open to the sky. In the exact center of the amphitheater stood a square altar of unadorned white marble.

Some of the seats were already occupied. Julo and his party were shown to places, and seated themselves. Other persons came in, until the place was nearly filled.

A few minutes before noon a bell sounded, and all conversation ceased. Then, through a doorway beneath the stands, a procession of yellow-robed priests entered the arena. They filed once around the circuit, then the leaders advanced to the center with golden baskets containing wood and tinder and incense, which they piled upon the altar. Then all except the high priest ranged themselves along the wall at the foot of the stands.

The high priest, kneeling beside the altar and raising his hands aloft toward the sun, began to intone a chant. Mayhew could make out none of the words, except the oft-repeated syllable, "Ra," which he had learned was the name of the sun.

As the priest ceased his chant, an even deeper hush settled over the audience. Then there came a flash, like lightning from the cloudless sky, and the pile on the altar blazed up.

A sigh, as of relief, passed through the crowd.

"Doubtless some easily explainable trick," thought the American, "but these people accept it as magic from their god."

A tiny cloud passed across the face of Ra, the sun; the fire began to smoke; a tenseness came over the crowd; and in that instant a cry of mortal agony rang out, as one of the circle of priests who lined the wall of the arena pitched forward on his face.

The hilt of a dagger protruded from his back, pinning to him a small piece of parchment, bearing the dread insigne of the spider! That, and nothing more.

Yet no one had been standing behind the stricken priest!

For an instant the near-by throng recoiled from their dead comrade. Then, at the command from the high priest, they picked up the body and hurried it to the altar. Sweeping aside the now smoldering sacrificial fire, the officiating prelate directed the gentle removal of the knife, and the placing of the dead body, face up, upon the altar. The sign of the spider he tore into small pieces and trod under foot. Then began a second chant to Ra, the sun, who by now had reappeared from the cloud.

To Adams Mayhew the entire performance was merely a part of the temple ritual, the worship of the sun god of these people, culminating in human sacrifice. How revolting! He marveled that a person of the evident intelligence and culture of Julo, his host, who had exhibited such repugnance at the spider-topped poster in the public square, and at the spider-marked piece of parchment plastered on his own front door, should nevertheless be driven by his superstitions or his religious fanaticism to attend temple services dedicated to the thing which he abhorred.

Mayhew glanced apprehensively about him and noted that Marta's face was white and quivering, and that Julo's black-bearded jaw was firm and set, and that the black guards, with drawn scimitars, were standing around the three of them in hollow-square formation, facing protectively outward. But perhaps this, too, was all a part of the ritual.

Then Mayhew remembered last night's fighting in the courtyard, and the Negro who had been found dead there, with the mark of the spider upon him. Surely a man's own religion would not creep into his household in the dead of night to commit assassination. Much perplexed, Adams Mayhew turned his attention back to the arena below him.

The high priest was still praying to Ra, the sun; and he seemed to be putting into his words much more sincerity and

depth of feeling than he had put into the original chant which had accompanied the lighting of the sacrificial fire.

As the aged prelate prayed, the body on the altar stirred slightly; whereupon all the priests burst into a joyous hymn of praise, and two of their number rushed forward to the center and bore their stricken comrade tenderly away. Then every one, including the audience, knelt in silent prayer.

The tension appeared to have been greatly relaxed.

If this was all mere ritual, it was well acted!

ON THE return of the party to the house of Julo, Mayhew's language lessons were resumed. Nothing further of excitement happened, although—or perhaps because—guards were posted every night in the courtyard, and no member of the household ever went out in the streets unescorted. Moorfi, the huge black man who had been assigned to Mayhew on the day of his arrival, always slept on the balcony just outside his door.

Marta became increasingly nervous in Mayhew's presence, and treated him as though he were an insane person who must be carefully coddled, lest he break loose and do violent damage. But Julo still displayed confidence in him, and regarded him with an amused and whimsical tolerance.

Naturally Mayhew was most anxious to return to America at the earliest possible moment, but in this desire he was unable to evoke any cooperation or even sympathy from his otherwise kind and considerate host, who absolutely refused to believe that any civilized people inhabited that barren and desolate continent, although he accepted Mayhew's announcement of his name. "Adamo Mayho" was as near as he could come to pronouncing it, however. Mayhew finally gave up the attempt to interest his host in the proposition of return, merely resolving that at some later date he would try to find passage home on some one of the many trading vessels which made port at this Golden City. And perhaps the presence here of the yellow-haired Eleria may have had something to do with dimming his eagerness to return home.

As the young American rapidly mastered the language of Mu, many of the matters which had puzzled him were cleared up. But many more were not.

For example, he learned that the island, or continent, on which he was located was known as "Mu" or "Ra Mu," "Ra" being the name of the sun, or sun-god, whom these people worshipped. Mu claimed to rule the entire world, which was known as "Ulu-umil Ra"; that is to say, the empire of the Sun.

Also he learned a little, but not much, about "the spider." The people of Mu did not know much about this creature themselves, except that he was supposed to be the head of a secret organization of some sort, which was bent on world domination. None of his followers had ever been apprehended. His whereabouts were unknown. Whoever attempted to thwart him was marked for slaughter.

The spider's demand for tentative recognition and a parley, posted in public squares on the day of Mayhew's coming, had been the culmination of a series of acts of terrorism. Julo had been leading and directing the investigation of the spider's activities. Hence the marking of Julo's door, and the midnight attempt to assassinate him.

IN SPITE of the rapid progress Mayhew made in learning the language of Mu, there was one word the meaning of which kept eluding him, namely the word "porto." Apparently it was the name for something which he resembled. Also, because the mention of it always appeared to embarrass his hostess, he deduced that it was an uncomplimentary epithet; and so at a very early stage of his language lessons he gave up asking even his host about the word.

This was most unfortunate, as events later turned out; for a knowledge of the meaning of that word "porto" might have saved him considerable discomfort and even danger.

But, although many matters appeared inexplicable, he did learn something about his host and his enemy, and the positions which they occupied in the community. Julo was a magistrate of some sort, a person high in the councils of the city. Tirio was a centurion of the police, rather dissolute, and quite a leader among the younger set. Also suspected of plotting against the government. A trouble maker and discontent-spreader. Although he did not come directly under the jurisdiction of the magistrate Julo, he stood in considerable awe of him. Tirio hated and feared Julo, much as a jackal hates and fears a lion. Most

of this, Mayhew learned from the faithful Moorfi.

In fact, Mayhew learned a great deal from Moorfi, who was a most garrulous and entertaining Negro, with an effervescent sense of humor and doglike loyalty.

Not all of Mayhew's time was spent indoors, nor even in the courtyard of Julo's house. Once or twice each day he explored the Golden City, sometimes accompanied by his host. Always, regardless whether or not Julo was with him, he was followed by Moorfi and one or two other blacks. Moorfi had been assigned as his personal body-servant, and had developed quite an attachment for him.

On these walks Mayhew never happened to run across the ferret-faced Tirio; but twice he met the beautiful golden-haired girl, Eleria, and each time she ignored him completely. Just why she acted this way, he could not imagine. Her coolness and disdain were even more inexplicable than Tirio's hatred.

One afternoon Mayhew and Moorfi were strolling along together through an unfrequented part of the city, followed by another huge black, a new-comer in the household of Julo. Moorfi was in the midst of telling Adams Mayhew a rather long and involved funny story about two traveling merchants, when suddenly a door was flung open just abreast of them, and four burly ruffians, garbed in the blue-bordered white tunics of the police swarmed out upon them, with broadswords in their hands.

CHAPTER V

KIDNAPED

ALTHOUGH taken completely by surprise, Moorfi was not in the least nonplussed. With one sweep of his left hand he thrust his master behind him, at the same instant drawing his scimitar and barring the way to the aggressors. The muscles of his bare brawny back and shoulders rippled with alert excitement.

Here, then, at last was the menace for which Mayhew had been tensely awaiting all these weeks. Here was the justification for the vigilance with which he and the other members of Julo's household had been guarded. The Spider had struck again.

Mayhew itched to get into the fight himself, for these thugs were evidently minions of that public enemy, the Spider; but unfortunately he was unarmed. So he turned, to urge the other black into the fray. But, to his surprise, he saw that he was standing irresolute, with his scimitar still in the sash of his pantaloons.

"Come on! Help, Moorfi!" shouted Mayhew. "What are you afraid of?"

But still the black did not stir, and there was a strange gleam in his eye that Mayhew did not like. Moorfi, warding off the attack of four blades, was falling back toward Mayhew and the other Negro.

"Here, give *me* your sword, if you're a coward!" exclaimed the young American, exasperated, as he reached for it.

But, with a quick and unexpected movement, the Negro suddenly clouted him on the side of the head with one huge hand, sending him reeling against the building. Then the black man drew his scimitar and leaped at Moorfi's unprotected back.

"Kataka, Moorfi!" shouted Mayhew.

With the lithe grace of a black panther, Moorfi wheeled, and met the descending blade with a sweep of his own.

Mayhew staggered to his feet. But his view of the fight between Moorfi and the other Negro was now cut off by the four thugs, who all pounced on him as he rose. He drove out his fist at the foremost and then went down again, with the four on top of him.

For a few moments he struggled, but his adversaries proved too much for him. His striped toga was yanked off of him, torn into strips and used to bind him. When the four thugs finally arose, Mayhew's ankles had been strapped together, his elbows bound behind his back, and his mouth gagged.

In the street in front of him lay the slashed and carved carcass of a huge Negro. Over the prostrate form stood Moorfi, his broad back gleaming with perspiration, and a red and dripping scimitar in one clenched fist. Unconcernedly he stooped and wiped his blade on the baggy pantaloons of his fallen victim, then picked up the other's scimitar from where it lay unreddened on the paving stones of the street and turned majestically, with a weapon in each hand, to face the four thugs.

Flashing one brief glance at Adams Mayhew, he addressed them, saying, "Well, I have disposed of his guard, and am at your service, gentlemen."

Mayhew gasped in amazement at this display of faithlessness on the part of his supposedly devoted Moorfi. Even the

four bruisers appeared to be a bit flabbergasted at this latest development. They shifted their feet uncertainly.

One said, "But isn't this fellow the one who tried to defend this 'porto' from us, when we first attacked him?"

"I think not," replied another.

"I'm sure that the *dead* Negro is one who resisted us," said the third. "I remember this fellow springing to help us."

"Well," remarked the fourth, "all Negroes look alike to me. Let's not take any chance of his being the wrong one."

But the third thug spoke up again authoritatively, "Captain Tirio told us that he had planted one of his own servants in Julo's household to help us with the kidnaping. And didn't this black man lead our victim right here to the appointed spot at the appointed hour?"

At this mention of Captain Tirio, Mayhew gave a start. He had thought that the attackers had represented the mythical Spider, and now they turned out to be merely minions of Tirio. Then a new idea occurred to him; perhaps they represented *both* Tirio and the Spider; perhaps those two were allies!

Meanwhile one of the thugs was asking Moorfi, "What is your name, fellow?"

"Tuggi," replied the black man without hesitation. "Tuggi, of the household of Tirio."

"There! You see—"

"Quick!" interrupted another of the thugs. "Some one is coming down the street. Here you, guard the corpse. I go to headquarters to report finding it. The rest of you, into the house with the prisoner!"

THE huge black man slid his two scimitars into his sash, and effortlessly lifted the trussed-up Adams Mayhew in his arms. As they passed into the house through the still open door with two of their captors, he whispered hurriedly in the ear of the young American. "Courage, master; it is all for the best. We may learn something by getting inside their house; and I could not attack them while you were bound."

The door closed behind them. They stood in a dimly lit corridor.

"Where shall I put the prisoner?" asked the Negro.

"Set him down here," replied one of the thugs, "while I go to report to Captain Tirio."

"Just a minute," interposed Moorfi, lowering his human burden to the floor.

Then as the departing man paused and turned expectantly, Moorfi leaped, and swung at him with his scimitar. The blade caught the man on the side of his neck and he went down with a gurgling groan.

"Surrender, in the name of the magistrate Julo," hissed Moorfi, turning on the other thug.

But, no coward, the other drew his short broadsword and rushed in, too close to be reached by the longer weapon of the Negro, at the same time calling loudly for help.

The noise of many approaching footsteps could be heard.

Moorfi dropped his scimitar, seized the wrist of the sword-hand of his assailant, and closed with him.

The scimitar thudded point downward to the floor and stuck there humming, within a few inches of Mayhew's feet, its edge toward him. In an instant he had thrust his feet against it, thus severing the strip of cloth which bound his ankles. Then backing around, he freed his elbows.

Without waiting to untie the gag about his mouth he snatched up the scimitar and drove it into the body of the man who was grappling with the Negro.

As the man collapsed, Mayhew tried to shout, "Quick, Moorfi, the door!" But all that came was a stifled grunt.

Then a throng of armed men bore down upon them from the corridor. Moorfi drew his remaining scimitar and side by side the two friends, black man and white, with their backs against the door, fought against the oncoming horde.

As Mayhew battled in the dimly lit corridor, he heard a familiar voice beyond and behind the throng of enemies, shouting, "Don't injure the prisoner. He must be captured unscathed."

Then some heavy object, hurtling through the air, struck him on the forehead and he knew no more.

WHEN he regained consciousness he was being carried hurriedly through the house. His ankles had again been tied together, and his elbows again were securely pinioned behind his back. His head ached terribly, and his ears hummed.

Through the confusion of his senses, he heard the voice of Tirio exclaiming, "The curse of Ra upon you! Why did you let the black man escape? Now he will warn Julo, and we'll have the whole town upon us!"

So the faithful Moorfi was safe! Adams

Mayhew heaved a sigh of relief. Then his head swam and a black fog engulfed him.

When he awoke it was night. He was lying, still bound and gagged, on a rough mattress which swayed gently up and down. His head throbbed dully. Around him he could hear the hum of voices, the lap-lapping of water and the rhythmic dip of oars. Overhead the stars shone. An intermittent warm breeze brought to his nostrils the sweet exotic scent of some pungent flower.

Mayhew felt unutterably tired, and drifted off to sleep.

The next thing he knew, he was lying on the stone floor of a small stone-walled room. He felt dizzy and bruised and battered. For a few moments he just lay and stared dully about him. Then he vaguely tried to remember who he was and how he had gotten here.

He was Adams Mayhew, of the crew of the whaling barque Alaska. That much was clear.

Then events began slowly to piece themselves together in his mind. The mirage. His fall overboard from the Alaska. The girl, Eleria. The rat-faced Tirio. The fight on the wharves. The kindly Julo, and his wife Marta. The faithful Moorfi. The various manifestations of the Spider, whoever that might be.

As his mind cleared, events came back to him more rapidly. He was the guest of Julo, magistrate of one of the seven cities of Mu. There had been a fight in the streets and he had been kidnaped.

He stretched his arms and felt of his bruised muscles; thus he noticed that he was no longer bound. He ran his fingers perplexedly through his sandy hair. He coughed, and noticed that he was no longer gagged.

Then he got unsteadily to his feet. His striped toga was gone and he was clad only in undershirt, waist-cloth, and sandals. He felt stiff and cold.

When he had stretched his cramped limbs and had slapped himself warm again he began to examine his surroundings. Although still somewhat dazed, there was growing in him a resentful realization that the rat-faced Tirio was responsible for his present predicament.

The room was about twenty feet square. On two sides were window openings, through which he could see blue sky and white clouds. He limped over to one of the windows and looked out and down. The room where he stood was in the second story of a stone castle. Green meadows stretched away to a wide river. Beyond the river were more fields, and then woods. Just this side of the woods a herd of large, stocky, russet-colored animals was browsing; but they were too far away for Mayhew to make out what they were.

He turned to the other window. Nothing there but rolling meadows, with blue hills beyond.

He turned back to the room. It was bare of all furnishings. One of the walls held a massive wooden door. In the fourth wall there was a small arched opening into another room, similar to the one he was in.

In fact, so exactly alike were the two rooms, perhaps this supposed opening was merely a mirror. Mayhew stepped over to investigate; sure enough, a replica of himself approached him from the other side.

Mayhew paused and surveyed his image. Not so battered up as he had thought! He grinned. His image grinned back at him.

Then he noticed that the reflection wore a striped toga, whereas he had thought that his toga was gone. He glanced down at himself; he had nothing on but his underwear, dirty and bedraggled underwear at that. He glanced back at the mirror, with a puzzled expression on his face; but the face in the mirror continued to grin.

Then the man in the mirror spoke.

"So it's true," said the man, and stepped through the opening towards him.

CHAPTER VI

"PORTO"

AS THE image of himeslf stepped out of the mirror and confronted him, Adams Mayhew fell back a pace, and gasped with astonishment.

"Who—who are you?" he asked.

The reply astonished him even more. It was a single word: "Porto!"

That strange word again! But here at last was the chance to solve the mystery of its meaning.

"What does that mean?" asked Mayhew.

"What does what mean?" countered the other man.

"That word. That awful word 'porto'!"

"Awful?" laughed the man. "'Porto'

isn't a *word,* it's my name. I'm Porto. Do you mean to say that you've been doubling for me all these weeks and have never heard my name?"

It was now Mayhew's turn to laugh.

"I've heard it often enough," he said, "but I never knew what it meant. I thought that it was some sort of insulting epithet, and so I always felt reluctant to inquire about it. If I had inquired the explanation would probably have solved a lot of questions which have been puzzling me."

"For instance?"

"Well, Tirio's hatred for me, and Eleria's scorn."

The face of his double clouded.

"So Eleria is scornful, is she?" he asked. "Curse of Ra! Then she believes me a coward! I credited her with more trustfulness than that."

"But who are you, and what is this all about?" Mayhew inquired.

"I must be brief," Porto replied, glancing nervously around, "for we haven't very much time. I'll give you only the high spots of my story. Tirio hates me—never mind why—partly because of a girl, and partly because he fears my interference in certain schemes in which he has secretly engaged. So he publicly challenged me to a blood feud, although he knows that I am more than a match for him."

"That was either courageous or rash of him."

"It was neither. For, instead of facing me personally, he caused me to be shanghaied aboard a trading vessel, and then gave out the story that I had run away for fear of him. But," bitterly, "I never expected Eleria to believe any such yarn about me. Well, anyway, I escaped from the ship one night, swam to another ship, and eventually landed in disguise at a small port on this island. Imagine my surprise at learning that I had already returned several weeks before, and had had a fight with Tirio on the wharves, but since then had remained in hiding in the house of Julo, afraid to meet Tirio again."

"But, what are you doing *here?*"

"Early last evening, on arriving at the city, still disguised, I learned that Tirio had just kidnaped me, and had disappeared with me. Knowing his habits, and his hangouts, I came directly here with quite a crowd of choice friends, whom I had hurriedly gathered, though I had some difficulty—thanks to you—to persuade them that I hadn't turned coward."

Mayhew began to protest, but his double silenced him with, "I'm sorry I was rude, but you can readily understand how I feel. This castle is now surrounded, but of course my friends won't interfere, so long as Tirio fights fairly and doesn't call in any of his thugs."

"Tell me one more thing," asked Mayhew. "Is Tirio allied with the Spider?"

Porto looked startled, then thoughtful.

"He might be, at that," he said judiciously. "I wouldn't put it beyond him, if he had a chance, for he, too, has been plotting against the government. Of course, no one knows who belongs to that sinister organization. And yet I rather think that Tirio does not. One of his own best friends was recently marked for slaughter."

"All the more reason to suspect him, if you'd ask me."

BUT Porto interrupted with, "Now you and I must hurry and exchange clothes. I'm fully armed. I want that rat-faced Tirio to get the surprise of his life when he comes here to badger you, or me, or whichever of us he thinks you are."

Mayhew laughed. Then asked, "How did you get in? And how am I to get out?"

"I climbed up a vine on one of the towers, and then, by means of a rope, I crawled down to one of the windows of the next room. I'll get the rope now."

He stepped out through the archway and in a moment was back with the rope, saying, "With this I can lower you down to the ground."

"But I don't like the idea of sneaking out of here," objected Mayhew. "Wouldn't it be much more fun for the two of us to confront Tirio together? Let's one of us fight him and pretend to get knocked out by him, and then have the other one of us step into the room and carry on. He'll think he is seeing a ghost."

Porto smiled appreciatively, but shook his head.

"It would never do!" he asserted. "This is a blood feud, so I must vanquish him alone and unaided. Come on, change clothes with me, and let me lower you out the window; the guards will be here any moment with your breakfast."

But just then there came the sound of the sliding back of the bar which held the door.

"Too late!" whispered Porto. "All right,

we'll have to try your scheme. Sit down and look weak and dazed. I'll step into the next room and await developments."

As they both did as planned, the door swung open, and Tirio entered, clad in the tunic of the police. Striding truculently over to where Mayhew lay on the floor, Tirio addressed him, "Well, fellow, do you still claim that you are not Porto?"

"Oh, no," replied Mayhew readily enough. "I'm willing to admit that I'm any one you say I am."

"Good!" exulted Tirio, rubbing his hands together. "I guess that the manhandling my men gave you last night knocked some of the cockiness out of you. Come, stand up and let me take a look at you."

"I don't choose to get up," said Mayhew simply, continuing to lie on the floor.

Tirio's face went red.

"Don't you realize that you are alone in my castle, and at my mercy!" he shouted.

"Am I alone?" asked Mayhew innocently. "Now, you know, I thought that there were at least two of me here."

"Enough of this foolishness!" exclaimed Tirio, drawing his broadsword from its scabbard at his waist and waving it menacingly. "Stand up or, by Ra, I'll cut a hole in you."

Mayhew scrambled hastily to his feet.

"I'm sure you wouldn't do anything like that," he said in a mock ingratiating manner. "You are by far too honorable a centurion to violate the rules of bloodfeudery. I am unarmed, as you have doubtless noticed; so it wouldn't be exactly ethical, would it, for you to cut a hole in me, as you so naively suggest?"

But Tirio had by now sufficiently recovered his composure so as not to be irritated by this line of sarcasm. Instead of flaring up again, he met sneer with sneer, and coolly announced, "You think so? Well, you will never carry back to the city any word of my chivalry; and there is no one else here to note whether or not I observe all the exact niceties of the blood-feud code."

"Isn't there, though?" said a quiet voice behind the centurion.

Tirio wheeled to confront a man standing in the archway to the adjoining room, a man toga-clad and calm, with arms folded. Quite a different person from the dirty, dishevelled, toga-less man whom he had just been baiting; and yet strangely the same.

"Porto!" exclaimed Tirio aghast.

"The same," replied the vision. Then, whipping out his sword, "Prepare to defend yourself."

"But who—?"

"Oh, just my double. There's two of me, you know."

"But it's against the rules!" Tirio fairly screamed. "You're taking a mean advantage of me!"

"Just as you took unfair advantage of Adamo Mayho here?" taunted Porto. "Oh, no. I'll do my own fighting, and Mayho will keep out of it."

At the mention of this name, the centurion steadied somewhat.

"So he isn't you, then?" he exclaimed with a relieved gasp.

"Naturally not!" Porto scornfully replied. "I have no occult power, whereby to duplicate or project myself. Come on and fight."

"But how can I know that he will keep out of the fight?"

"In the first place, he is unarmed. In the second place, you have my word of honor. In the third place, you have *his*. Hasn't he, Mayho?"

"Yes," replied Mayhew, "that is as long as he plays fair."

"I doubt it," said Tirio. "Help!" he suddenly shouted.

"Quick, Mayho, the door!"

Steps were heard running toward them in the corridor, and shouts of, "Yes, captain, we come."

The door was standing open, toward them. The stout wooden bar which sometimes served to lock it from the outside was leaning against the door-casing.

Porto glanced around at the opening and quick as a flash the centurion lunged at him with his sword. But Porto turned in time and deflected the blow with his toga-wrapped left arm, then lunged back at his opponent. Tirio, being clad in a tunic rather than in a toga, parried the blow with his sword; but was forced to fall back away from the door.

Meanwhile Mayhew leaped past the two contending men, snatched up the bar, slammed the door shut, and wedged the bar slantwise against it, with the bottom of the bar in a crack between two of the stones of the floor.

And just in time! For several heavy bodies immediately crashed against the portal from the outside. Mayhew threw his weight downward upon the bar, thus wedging it more tightly in place, then turned to watch the fighting.

Mayhew's double was driving the cen-

turion slowly backward around the room; and, even as Mayhew looked, dealt the man a cut across the left shoulder, and then recoiled just enough to avoid a vicious swipe in return.

Tirio felt gingerly of his wound with his left hand, and shouted, "Help!"

"Enough of that!" crisply admonished Porto. "There's a well-armed force of my friends concealed in the tall grass just outside this castle, a force strong enough to be more than a match for all your henchmen. I've a whistle here. If you try any trickery, or if your thugs succeed in breaking down that door, I shall blow the whistle, and you'll never live to tell that you defeated me."

But Tirio continued to call for help. The thudding of shoulders against the door changed to sharp blows as of a battering ram. The door quivered and shook at each impact, but the wedged bar held.

PORTO continued to drive Tirio backward around the room. Again his blade flashed out, nicking the centurion's arm. Porto's face wore a grim smile. He had established his supremacy over his enemy and was now playing with him.

But suddenly Tirio's yells for help ceased. A sly look of cunning crept into his evil face and his eyes narrowed dangerously as he edged toward a certain portion of the wall of the room. The pounding on the door increased in violence.

At last Tirio threw up his hands and stumbled backward. Porto lunged forward at him, sword extended at full arm's length. The stroke almost reached the unprotected breast of its intended victim. But the fat-faced Tirio had gauged exactly his own backward leap.

And now, as Porto recovered from his lunge, Tirio, instead of sweeping in on him, stepped sidewise and flung his weight against one of the stones of the wall. The stone yielded slightly, and at the same instant the section of floor on which Porto was standing gave way and Porto dropped into a yawning black abyss.

A stifled scream of surprise. The clatter of a sword on a metal chute. The swish of a sliding body. A dull thud. Then silence.

Tirio straightened and turned, broadsword in hand, to face the unarmed Adams Mayhew.

"Your turn next, Mayho," he growled.

For a moment the young American stood dazed by this sudden turn of events. Then he cringed backward in apparent fear against the wall. The centurion, his evil little eyes, snapping hate, strode over toward him, sword aloft.

But Mayhew's terror had been only pretended. His apparent cringe was really a crouch. As the sword was about to sweep down upon his unarmed form, he suddenly launched himself catlike upon his adversary. His left hand caught the sword-wrist of the centurion. The fingers of his right hand seized the other's throat. His face he buried in the other's breast, to shield it from the blows which Tirio's left hand now showered upon Mayhew's head.

For a moment they swayed together thus, then crashed down in a heap upon the stone flagging, close by the edge of the yawning hole through which Porto had disappeared.

The pounding on the door continued.

Mayhew dug the fingers of his left hand into his adversary's wrist until the sword dropped and went clattering down the chute. Then he transferred this hand, too, to Tirio's throat and squeezed mightily, oblivious of the blows now rained upon him by both fists of the latter.

The centurion's eyes bulged. His face became purple. His lips were flecked with foam. His blows gradually weakened. Then his entire body went limp.

At the same instant one upper corner of the door gave way with a crash.

There was no time to lose. If Mayhew would save his friend and double, Porto, he must get out of here before the minions of his enemy got in. Heaving the body down the chute, to the accompaniment of shouts of baffled rage from the faces which showed through the splintered aperture of the door, he leaped across to one of the windows, and shouted, "Help! Help for Porto!"

The tall grass waved below in the morning sunlight, but nothing else happened. There was no sign of the friends of Porto.

A knife, hurled through the hole in the door, struck the side of the window casing, glanced off, and dropped to the ground below. The men at the door of the room were now rapidly enlarging the opening with axes.

Seizing Porto's rope which lay in a heap on the floor, Mayhew tied one end to an iron hook which projected from the wall beside the window, threw the other end out, and lowered himself over the edge. A sword whizzed by his head. His last

view of the room, as his face disappeared below the sill, disclosed one of the thugs of Tirio clambering through the now enlarged hole in the door.

Down the rope scuttled the young American. The rope parted above him, tumbling him to the ground in a heap. A sword dropped point-down beside him, missing him by a fraction of an inch. Then he quickly regained his feet and stumbled off through the tall grass toward the grove of trees which was supposed to conceal the friends of Porto.

Once he glanced back, and saw the window which he had quitted, framing a half-dozen evil men in blue-bordered tunics, shaking their fists and shouting maledictions after him.

The grass of the meadow was waist high. As Mayhew was striding along through it a man suddenly rose from its concealment, and confronted him with the question, "Where are you going, Porto?"

Was this friend, or foe?

"Who are you?" asked Adams Mayhew, at once on the alert.

The man sneered.

"You've been acting very queerly of late, Porto," he said. "But can it be that you have forgotten your friend Angosto?"

"I'm *not* Porto," Mayhew replied. "I'm merely his double, and the reason for all these seemingly queer actions of your friend is that I haven't known until just now that he and I were twins."

"A likely story, Porto."

"But I'm *not* Porto," Mayhew excitedly exclaimed. "Quick! Porto is in trouble. He was winning the blood-feud, when Tirio suddenly opened a chute in the floor, and Porto disappeared. Where are his friends? We must hurry back and rescue him!"

"Hold on," objected Angosto. "You are Porto yourself. You've been defeated by Tirio. He has stripped your clothes from you. And you are now running away. You look pretty much of a wreck, if you'd ask me."

Suddenly the waters sank down, sickeningly, sucking Mayhew and the body he was holding, with them

"I didn't ask you," exclaimed Mayhew, beginning to lose his temper. "But we are wasting valuable time. Porto is in danger."

A third man stood up out of the surrounding grass and joined them.

"What's all the dispute about?" he asked.

"Porto is afraid to fight Tirio, and is sneaking home," sneered Angosto.

WHIRLING around to face the newcomer, Mayhew exclaimed, "You look as though you had brains. Will you take a chance that I'm telling the truth when I say that I'm not Porto, and that Porto is in danger due to Tirio's trickery?"

"Who are you, then?" asked the other, incredulously.

Chafing at the delay, Mayhew briefly recounted his adventures since landing on Mu. But as to his origin, he merely said that he came from a small settlement on the continent that had no name, and that his boat had been sunk off the shores of Mu. Not even to the kindly Julo had he ever related the true details of his fall overboard and the disappearance of the whaling barque Alaska; for these were too incredible.

When Mayhew had completed his story the newcomer determinedly announced, "I'll take the chance. We'll attack the castle at once. And, if it turns out that you really are Porto after all, as even I still believe, we can turn you over to Tirio and wash our hands of you."

"Fair enough," agreed Mayhew. "Come on."

The man pulled a whistle from the folds of his toga, and blew it. Instantly a dozen men arose from the grass on all sides and came hurrying over. The situation was explained in a few words to their incredulous ears; and then, drawing their swords with a resolute cheer, they set out for the castle.

During the latter part of the conversation Mayhew had been vaguely conscious of a loud and distant droning noise, like a woodpecker pounding on a tin roof. Now, as they started toward the castle of Tirio, Mayhew glanced around in an attempt to locate the source of this peculiar sound. It came from overhead. Far aloft, sweeping toward them, was what looked like a huge dragonfly, with rigid tail and four wings projecting sideward from near its head. The noise, reverberating against the flawless blue of the sky, became almost deafening as the thing approached. All the party stared up at it.

"What's that?" gasped Mayhew.

"Don't you know, Porto?" asked Angosto, incredulously. "Oh, I forgot, you claim not to be Porto. That thing is one of the flying chariots of the priesthood of Ra."

"A flying machine?" gasped Mayhew. "Some crazy scientists in my own country have claimed that men will sometime learn to fly, but of course that's absurd."

"The priesthood have been doing it here for years," Angosto explained, "but no one knows how they do it. It's a closely guarded secret, and the weird things are seldom seen."

The airplane passed by and out of sight. By this time Mayhew and Angosto and the other friends of Porto had reached the door of Tirio's castle.

"Now how are we to get in?" asked one.

To their surprise the door was flung open and one of the tunic-clad thugs rushed out.

"A truce!" he called. "A truce! The castle is overrun with spider-men! Come help us against the common enemy."

"Death to the spider-men!" shouted the leader of Mayhew's party. "Come on! But," he urged in a lower tone of voice, "beware of treachery."

Then, with drawn swords, they charged through the open doorway into the dark interior of Tirio's castle.

CHAPTER VII

THE SPIDER-MEN

THE eyes of the invaders had scarcely adapted themselves to the dimness of this lower corridor of Tirio's castle, after the contrasting bright tropical sunlight outside when they were set upon by a veritable pack of little yellow men.

Mayhew stumbled over a prostrate body and fell to his hands and knees. He could see more distinctly now. The body wore a blue and white tunic. The fighting passed on into the interior.

A sword was clutched in the dead fingers. Mayhew freed it and weighed it in his own hand. Then an idea came to him: if he was to rescue Porto, how better than by disguising himself as one of the forces of Tirio? So he hastily donned the tunic and armlets of the fallen thug. Then he too pressed on toward the noise of the fighting.

Another tunic-clad individual entered

from a side corridor. Before this man was aware of Mayhew's presence, Mayhew had seized the man's shoulder and had pressed the point of his blade against the man's ribs.

"Lead me to the dungeon at the foot of the chute, which runs from the tower room," he hissed.

"Who are you?" asked the man, squirming a bit.

"Never mind," Mayhew replied. "Lead on. And no treachery."

"But we are all friends for the moment," objected the thug. "The castle is overrun with spider-men."

How do you know?" asked the American. "I thought that no one had ever seen a spider-man."

"No one ever has before today. But these are spider-men, all right. Look!"

Mayhew looked. In the hallway in front of them stood two small, slant-eyed, Oriental-looking individuals, each holding a pair of sharp daggers. Each was clad in a flaming red tunic, on the breast and back of which was emblazoned the black, squat, repulsive spider symbol, with which Mayhew had become so familiar. A moment ago the corridor had been empty.

As he stared at these two weird newcomers, they sprang. One launched himself at Mayhew, the other at Mayhew's captive. The American swung his blade at the left wrist of his assailant, at the same time crouching and driving his left fist into the man's midriff. The man crumpled, and Mayhew dropped astride him and disarmed him.

Glancing up, the American satisfied himself that his companion was holding his own in the knife duel with the other spider-man; then turned his attention back to the man beneath him. But, to his surprise, he found himself kneeling astride of nothing! The spider-man was no longer there. And yet Mayhew had not felt him wriggle out from under.

Passing his left hand perplexedly through his sandy hair, Mayhew scrambled to his feet and looked hastily and alertly around. But he stood alone in the corridor. The two spider-men and the minion of Tirio had all vanished into thin air!

He shook his head with perplexity, and much disturbed, passed cautiously on along the corridor. A stairway attracted his attention and gave him an idea. If he could get to the tower room in which he and Porto had fought with Tirio, perhaps he could go down the chute and find his friend. He sped up the stairs.

In the upper hall he found a coil of rope. The room which he sought, he identified by its broken door. Yes, there was the hole in the floor, still gaping open.

He knelt at its edge and stared down, but could see nothing except the beginning of the chute, shading off into the black depths below.

"Porto!" he called. "Tirio!"

No answer.

So, sheathing his sword, he tied his rope to the hook by the window, and then threw its other end down the chute.

But, just as he knelt to lower himself down the chute, he was pounced upon from all sides by a perfect swarm of little yellow spider-men. The attack was unexpected. He had not heard or seen them enter the room. Yet here they were, and he was unarmed and at their mercy.

Against overwhelming odds he fought. Fought, though he lay upon the floor beneath a pile of humanity. He heard one of the enemy gasp and then go shrieking down the chute, to a thud and silence.

His own wind was cut off. He strained to breathe.

Gradually Adams Mayhew's senses cleared again. He still lay at the bottom of a pile of warm and smelly human bodies, but they were picking themselves up. He drew great gulps of air into his tortured lungs, but the air tasted sulphurous and strangely unrefreshing. Although the mist cleared from his eyes, the redness of all his surroundings still persisted.

He struggled to his feet and stared around, but recognized nothing.

Although he had not passed completely out—he was sure of that one fact—nevertheless the room of Tirio's castle, where he had been but an instant before, had now miraculously metamorphosed into a vaulted cave with stalactite-covered walls and ceiling, lit by the reddish glare of flickering torches.

On the ground beside him lay another man, the henchman of Tirio, by whose side he had fought in the lower hallway of the castle, and who had so miraculously disappeared in the midst of that fight. Around the two of them stood scores of the little yellow men, in their red tunics with the spider insigne.

One of them was announcing, "Excellency, we bring you the last two of the wearers of the blue and white."

"Fools!" hissed a voice, and its metallic menace sent a chill through Mayhew and caused the hairs to rise on the back of his neck. "Fools, this is not the man. Neither of these is the centurion Tirio."

Mayhew's gaze sought the source of this obscene voice.

He saw a sqaure-cut throne of blood-red marble. On each of the two corners of the top of the back there reposed a white and grinning human skull. In the seat of this throne there sprawled a black spider with a yellow face! Was it a spider? Or was it a man?

Yes, it was a man. But what a creature! It was a fat, squat, bloated hunchback, clad in a tight-fitting, closely-knitted black garment. Lean clawlike fingers gripped the two arms of the throne.

THE creature's head was bald and parchment-skinned. Its eyes were slanted. Its nose and chin were both hooked, until they nearly met. Its mouth was wide, its lips thin and cruel; and through them there projected two long, sharp, white dog-teeth, like poison fangs.

"Take them away," it croaked, waving one taloned hand toward Mayhew and his prostrate companion. "Take them away and feed them to the eternal fires."

Instantly several of the little yellow men leaped upon Mayhew and tied his arms behind his back before he had a chance to resist. The henchman of Tirio was jerked to his feet and similarly tied. Then the two of them were prodded with sharp knives out of the presence of the repulsive creature on the red marble throne.

To the accompaniment of many flaming torches they were driven through winding pasageways of solid rock. It seemed they went miles. It became a treadmill existence like sleep-walking. When either of them stumbled and fell, as occurred increasingly often, the luckless one was kicked and prodded and knifed to his feet again.

Gradually the smell of sulphur in the air became more and more oppressive. A flickering red glare, somehow different from that of the torches, loomed ahead down the corridor. At regular intervals a shriek of agony could be heard. Each shriek ended abruptly, as though suddenly snuffed out.

Finally the passageway widened out into a huge cave, at the far end of which there was an inferno of flames, rising from the level of the floor and extending a hundred feet or more upward, to disappear through an aperture in the roof. Silhouetted against these fires were four or five small groups of men, and at the very edge of the flaming abyss there stood a score or more individuals armed with long spears.

As Mayhew's party entered the chamber, one of the groups ahead bustled a resisting figure up into the midst of the spearmen, who promptly presented the points of their spears to the poor creature's back and forced him to the brink. He struggled to escape them, but he had to move or be impaled, until at last he toppled over the edge with a despairing shriek which came to an abrupt end with a puff of flame.

It reminded Adams Mayhew of a moth flying into a lamp, and being suddenly snuffed out.

Victim after victim was driven over the edge of the eternal flames, until finally there were left only Mayhew and the henchman of Tirio. Of these two, Mayhew's turn came first. In spite of his struggles, he was prodded forward and turned over to the spearmen. His bonds were cut, doubtless to render his death agonies more interesting. Then, with the sharp spears pricking into his back, the relentless march to the flaming brink began.

He reached the edge and looked down. And now he saw that what he had taken for flames, when viewed from the entrance to the cavern, was not flames at all, but rather the reflections from a seething caldron below, cast upon a rising cloud of smoke and steam. He glanced upward, and saw this cloud being sucked into an unending funnel above, a veritable chimney.

Down again into the pit he stared. Not more than twenty or thirty feet below the ledge on which he stood, there boiled and surged a lake of molten fire. It flowed and seethed and jostled. Parts of it bubbled upward, and then spread outward like springs of glowing water. Still other parts, caught between two opposite streams, eddied and whirled.

Sometimes real flames would leap upward and lap the rock on which he stood. One such flame, reaching higher than the others, singed his hair and eyebrows and eyelashes, and drove him back against the sharp points of spears.

Recoiling from a score of cuts, he leaned suddenly forward again, lost his

balance, and toppled at the brink. But, with a mighty effort, he flung his body back against the spear-points, and did not flinch as they bit into his flesh again.

The rock upon which he stood crumbled. His sandaled feet slid over the edge, and he landed sitting on the very brink. The smell of burning flesh—or leather—assailed his nostrils, and intense pain shot through his legs.

Flinging himself upon his back, he lifted his legs high out of the licking flames, only to have them beaten down again with the points of spears. Other spear-points jabbed into his neck and shoulders, and pushed him slowly toward the edge.

With one last despairing effort, he rolled over onto his face. His entire body from the waist down was now hanging over the flames, but the caldron was for the instant indulging in one of its momentary lulls, and the cool breeze, which the draft of the devil's chimney sucked through the caverns toward this spot, reduced to some extent the searing heat on his lower limbs.

He grabbed for the haft of one of the prodding spears, only to have the sharp edges of its point tear his palm as it was yanked from his grasp. Again he grabbed, this time with both hands and higher up. And this time he was prepared for the backward yank. He held tight, and threw up one knee.

Out of the pit he came. And when the spearman, too late, changed his tactics and thrust instead of pulling, Mayhew was already on his feet again, and able to push the spear to one side and let go.

Then, before the spearman could recover or any of the others could jab, Mayhew lunged forward, flung his arms around the spearman, dragged him to the floor, and rolled over with the spearman on top, so that the latter's body would protect him momentarily at least, from the thrusts of the others.

In this position, the American held on like grim death.

For a few seconds Mayhew was able to hold the body of the spearman protectingly above him. But knives, jabbing into the muscles of his arms, soon loosened his hold, and the man was dragged off of him.

Mayhew was jerked to his feet and, bleeding and staggering, was once more hustled to the edge of the pit.

As he tottered at the brink, a shout of command echoed through the chamber. The spear-thrusts ceased; but Mayhew, too weak to stand any longer, lurched over the edge into the eternal flames.

CHAPTER VIII

TO BE A SLAVE

THE next thing Mayhew knew he was lying painfully on a hard stone floor, while a group of men, weirdly illumined by flickering red light, were standing above him, arguing about something.

"But I tell you the boss said he wanted two, not one."

"Maybe so. Maybe so. But what good is this fellow, thoroughly scorched and full of spear-holes?"

"There's no harm in trying him. If he lives and stands the work, well and good. If he dies, he dies. And if he lives and can't do the work, back he can go to the eternal fires."

At this point Mayhew interposed with a faint, "What happened? Didn't I fall into the volcano?"

"You did, fellow," one of the guards replied. "But I dropped my spear, reached over, and grabbed you, just in the nick of time. You nearly pulled me in with you. And now, after all my trouble, some of these yellow friends of mine insist on throwing you back in again."

The speaker, although he wore the red tunic of the forces of the spider, had the features of a white man.

"But I don't understand," persisted Mayhew, now sitting up and staring around him. "Why was I pulled out at all?"

"Somebody yelled, 'Stop! Save him! We need two!" explained the white spearman. "And so, without thinking, I grabbed."

"Two what?" asked Mayhew.

"Two slaves. His excellency, the spider, keeps a certain number of thousands of slaves. All over that number go to feed the fires of our goddess."

"Then you don't worship Ra?"

"Pele forbid!" chanted the group in unison.

Things were going fine. So long as Mayhew could keep up this conversation, he was staving off the fatal trip back to the eternal fires. He brightened perceptibly, in spite of the pain of his burns, and his faintness from loss of blood.

"So I'm to be a slave?" he mused aloud.

"Not a chance," replied one of the group. "You're too done for."

"Look here," said the white spearman, wheeling around upon the last speaker. "The boss sent for two, didn't he? Well, then, we'll send him two." Then to Mayhew, "Stand up, fellow. If you can make it, your life is saved. Good luck to you."

The American staggered to his feet. His tunic was gone—burned off, probably. His sandals were charred. His legs were blistered. One hand was throbbing painfully. And he was covered with blood.

But he was still alive!

"Lead on," said he, grimly setting his teeth.

"Just a minute," interposed the white spearman.

Walking over to Mayhew, he placed one of his feet alongside one of the American's and studied the comparison.

"A bit large," he mused, "but all the better. Here, fellow, sit down while I fix you up."

Mayhew was glad enough to obey.

But one of the yellow spearmen objected.

"You're a sentimental fool," he said.

The white spearman wheeled around upon him with a menacing, "Pele is hungry for such as you."

The objector promptly subsided. Then the white spearman reached up under his own red tunic and removed his nether undergarment, which he tore into strips. Tenderly unfastening the charred remains of Mayhew's sandals, he bound these strips around his feet. Then he removed his own sandals and adjusted them over these bandages.

"There, fellow," he said, getting to his feet and dusting off his hands, "now you have a fighting chance to survive."

Mayhew, too, arose.

"Thank you ever so much—" he began.

But his benefactor cut him off with, "It's nothing. I may be an exile from my own people, but I'm still human."

"His excellency shall hear of this," muttered one of the others.

"And if so, so will Pele," snapped the white spearman.

"Let's get going," interrupted the messenger who had come for the two slaves. "And I'll need two guards."

"Take Tolofo. We don't want him," chorused several.

AND so it was that Tolofo, the white spearman who had befriended Mayhew, was one of those to accompany him on his long and painful pilgrimage.

The two prisoners and the messenger carried torches. Tolofo and the other guard carried spears. In addition, the messenger and the two guards wore broadswords hung from a belt of polished steel links.

The route led for about a mile through winding subterranean tunnels. Mayhew gritted his teeth and struggled to keep up with the others, but it was grim work.

Finally they reached the foot of a circular shaft, through the far distant top of which could be seen the blue sky. Around the walls of this shaft there ran a spiral staircase, up which the party began to climb.

Mayhew's feet by now had ceased to hurt. But, what was worse, they had become numb. He had hard work controlling them; they refused to track, yet he stumbled upward.

In his unsteady condition, fearing the sheer edge of the steps, unguarded by any rail, he hugged the wall, until the yellow spearman, bringing up the rear, bumped against him. Unable to recover his balance, he lurched toward the edge. The yellow spearman jabbed at him with his weapon; but Tolofo, turning, drove in with his own spear, warding off the blow, and with the same motion forcing Mayhew back upon the step.

"It would be very unfortunate," Tolofo remarked in a casual tone, "if a yellow spearman should accidentally fall to the bottom of this shaft."

"It would be more unfortunate," interposed the messenger, "if some one were to report how it happened."

"And it would be still more unfortunate," the white spearman retorted, "if two yellow men fell down the shaft."

The party resumed their upward climb, Tolofo keeping close to Mayhew, and between him and the edge, the rest of the way up.

At last they reached the top, and stood on a mountain spur. Behind them towered the smoking volcano, which Mayhew had seen before, but never so close as this. Before them were foothills, and beyond those were rolling prairies beribboned with streams, and dotted with groves, villages and farms. In the far dim distance shone the domes and minarets of the Golden City, and beyond that sparkled the sea.

The clear mountain air felt most refreshing after the sulphurous fumes and the torch-smoke of the caverns. The

light of Ra, the sun, was most cheering, after the red glare of Pele, the fire goddess.

Mayhew's head began to clear. His wounds had already limbered up considerably, and now the feeling began to return to his numbed legs.

For a few moments the party sat on the rocks and rested, then they turned to the left and took up a winding trail along a shoulder of the mountain. For hour after hour they trudged on, over rough volcanic rocks, sometimes uphill, sometimes down, but rarely on the level.

To keep his mind off his troubles, Mayhew let his thoughts dwell on the crowded affairs of the last few hours. Less than a day ago he had been peacefully living in the Golden City of Mu, a guest of the magistrate Julo. Since then he had been kidnaped by Tirio; had met his own double, Porto; had fought first against the forces of Tirio, and then with them against the spider-men; had been miraculously spirited away from Tirio's castle to the caves of living fire, where he had met the spider face to face; had been almost sacrificed to Pele; and finally had trudged miles and miles.

He thought of Eleria. Mistaking Adams Mayhew for his double, Porto, and misinterpreting his ignorance for cowardice, she had never relented, had never unbent toward him. And yet it was her presence in the Golden City, and the hope of breaking down her reserve and eventually making her acquaintance, that had reconciled Adams Mayhew to the gradually growing realization that for him at least, America somehow no longer existed, and that he was doomed to spend the rest of his existence on the continent of Mu.

With these thoughts he plodded doggedly on. His thought became blurred and incoherent. On a treadmill, through a thick haze, he pursued the floating vision of a cameo-cut face, surmounted by an aureole of honey-colored hair. At length, even this face vanished. A black fog engulfed him. Adams Mayhew was "out on his feet."

"Halt!" sung out a peremptory voice ahead of them. "Who comes?"

The five men halted. Mayhew swayed for a moment. Then his knees crumpled, and he sunk silently to the ground.

Ages later, he came to his senses again. Every muscle of his body ached. His feet and legs stung and throbbed excruciatingly. But he was lying on soft mats, and over him was bending a kindly face masked behind a luxuriant and bushy blond beard.

"Well, fellow," said the voice of Tolof, "you've had a long, hard pull, but you've made it."

"Where am I?" weakly asked the American.

"At one of the labor camps of his excellency."

"And what are *you* doing here?"

"I've had a stroke of luck, which shows that it pays to do a kind deed. When we reached here ten days ago, one of the foremen had just died. The boss liked my looks and gave me the job. So here I am, sitting pretty. All of which is probably a good thing for you, too. I had quite an argument with the boss as to what to do with you."

"I suppose he wanted to send me back to Pele," wryly.

"Not at all. Much simpler than that. Just heave you into the sea."

"Are we near the sea?" asked Mayhew, an immense longing welling into his heart.

"Just a few hundred paces."

Mayhew sat up and sniffed the salt breeze. In the not far distance he could hear the pounding of surf upon rocks, and the sucking rattle of pebbles under receding waves. A smile formed upon his face and he sank back contentedly among the sleeping mats.

"You'll do, fellow," remarked Tolofo approvingly.

CHAPTER IX

THE STORM

A FEW days later Mayhew was up and about. He had been staying in the foreman's own private cave, but now he was transferred to one of the prison cells of the workers, an evil smelling hole, barred with an iron grating and shared by a dozen rough men.

This entire squad, which Tolofo commanded, was made up of white men. Some had been gentlemen before their capture by the Spider, and some had been bums, but all were now indistinguishably vicious and desperate.

Tolofo ruled them with an iron hand, yet always with such fairness and consideration that the men soon grew to respect and almost love him. A warm bond sprang up between him and Mayhew. At first the other men resented this, but

after Mayhew had thrashed the camp bully for accusing Tolofo of favoritism, they respected him too.

This particular labor camp was located near the head of a deep rocky fjord. Inland from the fjord and separated from it by a thin but high wall of rock was a small salt-water lake, in which the tide rose and fell in unison with the sea outside, thus indicating some concealed connection between the two. From this lake, the slaves of the Spider were employed in tunneling into the heart of the mountain, for the rumored purpose of providing a canal, which should lead to a secret harbor, close and convenient to the throne-room of his excellency.

Other labor battalions were at work excavating this supposed harbor, and in digging outward therefrom to meet the tunnel on which Mayhew and his fellow laborers were engaged.

Mayhew's wounds and burns at last were healed. His singed hair grew out again, long and unkempt. And a bushy blond beard developed. Soon he was able to do a day's digging alongside the best of them.

Then came the day of the great storm. The gang was working in the tunnel, when the sea end of it gave way to the beating of the waves, and a sudden rush of waters engulfed them. An instant ago they had been picking and shoveling, by the light of a score of flares. Now they found themselves caught and tumbled about in the swirl of a whirlpool, with all of the torches but one extinguished. Toward that one light they fought, choking, gasping, clawing at each other and at every projection of rock.

Mayhew was the first to reach firm ground and drag himself out upon a ledge.

Above the reverberating din of the pounding waves, he shouted, "Use your heads! Help each other! Don't fight!"

Another slave pulled himself up on the ledge beside the American and lay whimpering. Mayhew shook him into coherence. Then, as successive surges brought the clawing mass of humanity within their reach, they seized two of their friends and pulled them ashore.

Soon all the squad were accounted for. They ceased their efforts and panted from their exertions.

Suddenly one of them exclaimed, "Where's Tolofo?"

All the workers were saved, but not the foreman. Mayhew snatched the torch from its niche, and held it far out over the black waters. Just at the limit of its beams he thought he saw a rising and falling shape which might be a human body.

Handing the flare to the nearest man, he said, "Hold it for me," and plunged in.

He reached the floating shape and grasped it. Just then the light went out. An eddy whirled him around and he lost all sense of direction. Holding tight to the tunic of the body, he tried to swim toward where he imagined his friends to be; but suddenly the waters sank down, sickeningly down, down, sucking him with them, and then something hard and sharp struck his head from above.

For a moment he was stunned, but he never loosened the grip of his right hand. When he opened his eyes again it was to the gray daylight of a driving storm. He was in the basin of the salt lake.

But the return swell was bearing him back again toward the face of the rock wall of the tunnel. Frantically he attempted to stem the tide. The waters sucked him on and down. But just as he reached the face of the cliff the current turned, and carried him out again. Almost exhausted, he swam toward the rocky shore of the lake.

Alternately he was swept this way and that, but at last he made it, and hauled himself and the body of Tolofo out onto a low pinnacle of rock, where he lay and held on for dear life.

The side of the basin was too steep for him to climb, even if he had not been burdened by the body of his friend. All he could do was hold on. The waves broke over him, the storm beat upon him, yet still he held on.

But gradually his hold weakened. He shouted for help, against the roar of wind and wave, but no one answered.

CHAPTER X

ANOTHER IMPERSONATION

ADAMS MAYHEW clung with one hand to the wave washed rock, and with the other to the tunic of Tolofo. He resolved to let go of the rock before he would relinquish his hold on his friend; but he bent every effort to retain both.

A pebble dropped on him. He heard a slipping, scraping sound above the roar of the storm. Glancing up, he saw a man-like shape descending the face of the cliff. A hand reached out and touched him.

With a lurch he let go of the rock and grasped the hand. It pulled him to his feet. Then, with the last ounce of strength remaining in him, he passed the body of Tolofo up to the man above.

A few minutes later Mayhew himself was being handed from man to man up the face of the cliff.

The whole squad regathered in the quarters of the foreman. Tolofo at last opened his eyes, but he was very weak, and kept spitting blood.

They told him how Adams Mayhew had rescued him.

"Fellows," said he, "I'm done for. I think my whole side is caved in. Mayho, you're a good fellow. With that beard you look enough like me that a stranger would not know the difference. Why not *be* me? And, when I die, bury Adamo Mayho." He coughed painfully and spat.

"It hurts to talk," he said, yet he kept on. "You know something of my story; how I fled from the Golden City, an outlaw, accused of a crime of which I was innocent. I have been a spiderman for six moons, a spearman all that time. This—information—will—enable—you—"

A paroxysm of coughing ensued. His head flopped to one side, and his stiffened body relaxed and slumped. Tolofo, the renegade, was dead.

A subdued gang of burly men stripped the body of its blood red tunic and carried it through wind and rain to the edge of the cliff.

"Too bad we haven't a priest to consign his soul to Pele," mused one.

"To Pele with Pele!" shouted another. "He was white, even if he was a spiderman. His soul will go to Ra."

"I used to work in one of the temples," diffidently put in a third. "I can give part of the ritual."

"Go on," urged a fourth.

So they laid the body face-up upon the rain lashed rocks and the thug who had once been a temple attendant haltingly recited the chant to Ra. As he finished there came a rift in the clouds above and a single beam of sunlight shot down for an instant upon the little funeral group.

"Over with him, while the sun-god smiles!" whispered one, and the body of Tolofo splashed into the raging lake beneath.

"In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen," said Mayhew under his breath, as he turned away with a tear in his eye.

"Well," remarked one of the others, "we've buried Adamo Mayho. What are your orders, Tolofo?"

Mayhew snapped back to the present.

"My orders," said he quietly, "are that one of you go down to headquarters, report to the boss the breaking of the seawall and the drowning of Mayho, and convey my request for an extra issue of wine because of the hardships which you have been through."

"Three cheers for Adamo Mayho!" shouted one.

"Careful!" cautioned another. "You mean: three cheers for Tolofo."

Thus the new Tolofo rose phoenixlike from the ashes of the old.

That night Mayhew slept in the quarters of his friend and former chief, and the next day he took up his duties as foreman of the gang.

At noon a messenger arrived with a letter for Tolofo. Mayhew opened it; then ran his fingers through his hair. The crest of the letter was a squat, sprawled, hairy black spider; that was familiar and understandable enough. But Mayhew had not sufficiently mastered the written language of Mu to be able to make out more than one or two of the hieroglyphics which formed the message.

THIS presented a quandary. Was Mayhew, in his guise as Tolofo the foreman, supposed to be able to know how to read? Nothing to do but take a chance and find out.

"Any reply?" asked the messenger.

"Speak when you're spoken to," the American curtly answered. "There will be a reply, but I shall not have it ready until tomorrow. Go down to headquarters and ask them to put you up for the night."

When the messenger had departed, Mayhew hastily called his squad together and asked, "In my previous existence did I know how to read?"

No one could remember.

"Can any of you read?"

The man who had worked in a temple claimed to be able to read a little; but, after perusing the letter for several minutes, he had to admit that he could make nothing of it.

Later in the day, the boss came by to see what progress they were making toward clearing up yesterday's débris, and to give them instructions for sinking a new shaft a safe distance back from the present water-filled tunnel. When they had agreed upon the details of this new

project, Mayhew drew the letter out of the pouch which hung from his sword belt and handed it over to the boss.

The latter read it through with pursed lips, then stared fixedly at Mayhew.

"You've read this yourself, of course?" he asked.

"Well—no," admitted the supposed foreman. "I tried to, but somehow I couldn't quite catch the drift of it."

"Why, I thought that you could read!" exclaimed the boss. "You were an educated gentleman before you enlisted under the Spider."

"True," admitted Mayhew, putting on a sheepish expression. "But I was a wild youth, and my education was rather neglected. That's how I came to get into the trouble which drove me to seek refuge with his excellency."

"Yes, I know," mused the boss. "But you always claimed to be able to read."

"True again," said Mayhew, "and I threw a pretty good bluff at it, too. I did it in the hope of advancement."

"Well, at least you have the good sense to risk your reputation, rather than to conceal this letter. Are you sure that Adamo Mayho was drowned? That he didn't escape?"

"Why—yes," stammered Mayhew. Then, recovering his poise with an effort, he continued: "Has any one who has gone over the hill ever gotten by the guards?"

"No. But you are reported to have been unduly friendly with this Mayo," pointedly accused the boss.

"He was my best worker," Mayhew boldly countered.

"Well, you have produced wonderful results with your gang," grudgingly admitted the boss. "It's a good thing for Mayho that he *is* dead, if he is; for this letter is an order from his excellency that Mayho be seized and bound at once, as a dangerous character, and sent back to the throne room. Reading between the lines, I think I can see that Pele is hungry."

AT THE close of the work that day Mayhew was still thanking his lucky stars that he had changed places with the dead Tolofo. But he did not remain thankful for long.

As he was locking his squad in their cells for the night, one of them beckoned to him and whispered, "How about leaving the grating unlocked? Some of us might want to go over the hill, you know."

"You're crazy," Mayhew replied. "In the first place, you couldn't make it, even if I helped you. And in the second place, I'm foreman now."

"Is that so?" sneered the other. "What good does it do us to have a fellow slave for foreman, unless he helps us to escape? Think it over for a day or two. One of us overheard you talking with the boss this afternoon, so we know what was in that letter from his excellency, the Spider. We know what is in store for Adamo Mayho, if he gets found out. So think it over—*Tolofo*."

"I'm doing this for your own good," Mayhew retorted, but somehow his words did not sound particularly convincing.

He did think the matter over—very seriously—that night. Truly he was in a fix, and just when he had thought that everything was rosy. If he helped his former pals to escape, it would mean court-martial for him. And if he did not help them to escape, it would mean exposure and certain death in the eternal fires of Pele.

Late into the night he lay awake, puzzling over his predicament. And at last, along toward morning, a happy solution occurred to him. Perhaps not a happy solution, but at least an alternative which might possibly succeed. He would go over the hill with his men.

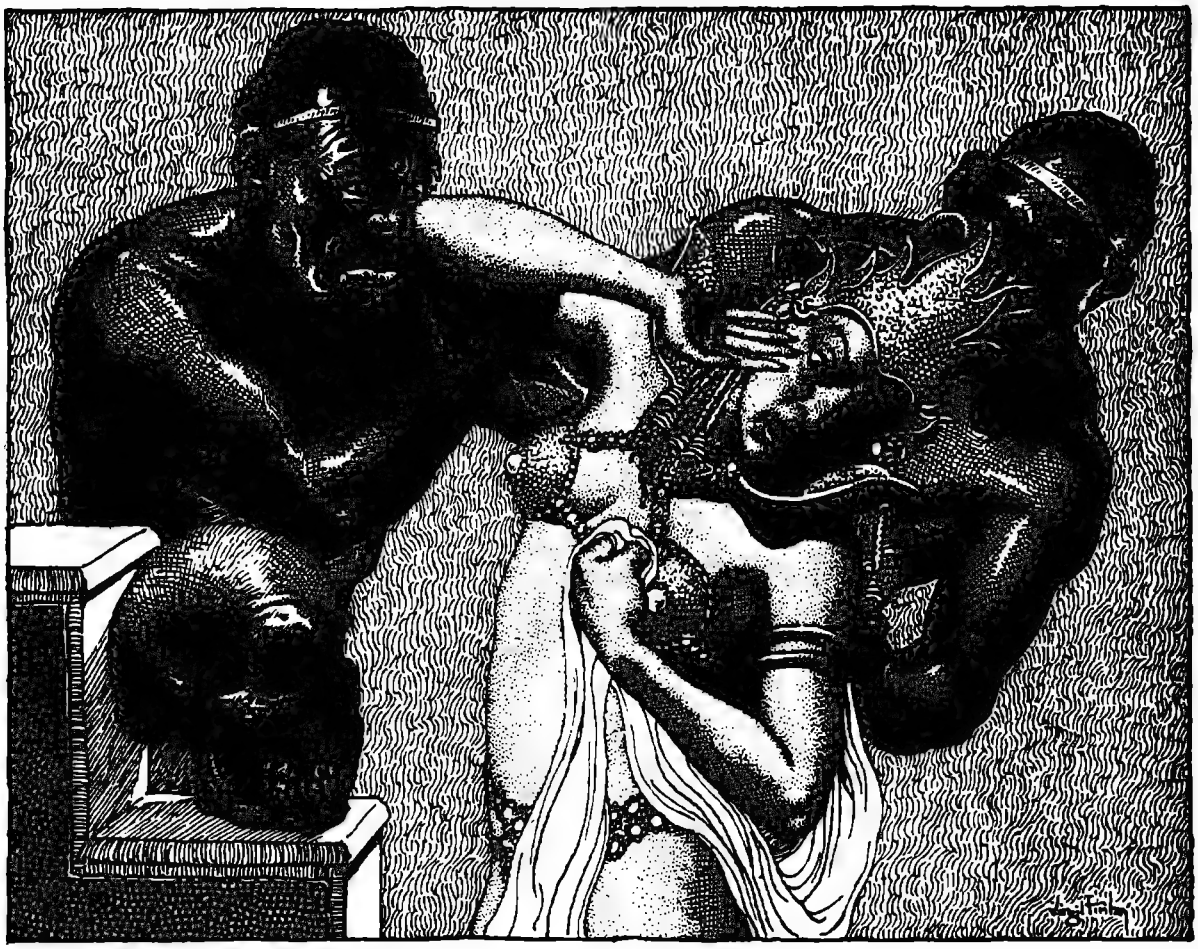
If intercepted, his credentials as foreman might possibly get them through, if he could think of a plausible story to explain their presence wherever they happened to be caught. The more he thought of this plan the better it seemed.

At last he arose from his sleeping mats, tiptoed out of his cave, and walked softly to the cave which quartered his men. Tapping on their grating to arouse them and attract their attention, he explained his plan. It was enthusiastically received. He was restored to their good graces.

In fact, as one of them expressed it, "Good old Tolofo is a regular fellow again."

It was decided to make the break the following night. Several of the men knew the surrounding country for quite a distance. But, beyond that, their fate was on the knees of Ra.

But with the morning there came a message summoning him before the boss. And the boss informed him of a decision to send him back to the throne-room of the Spider, to explain to his excellency the strange disappearance of Mayho.



As the Oriental girl reached the throne and saw the king who had summoned her, her face went stark with horror

Mayhew's first reaction was intense relief. His problem was solved for him. But the more that he thought about the situation the more he came to realize that he was merely being plunged from one danger into another.

The Spider might see through his assumed identity. Some person at court might recognize him as not being Tolofo. Or his gang, cheated out of their planned escape, might tell the boss that he was an impostor.

Perhaps his men would believe him, when he explained the situation to them. Perhaps they would realize that their own self-interest would be best served by keeping quiet until his return, in the hope that they could then effect the planned escape.

But, when he got back from headquarters to his own cell, he found that a substitute foreman had already led his squad off for the day's work. So, with ominous forebodings, he packed up the few belongings of the predecessor whose name he had assumed and accompanied the messenger of the Spider.

THE return trip was a revelation to Adams Mayhew. Having traversed the road in the reverse direction in a wounded and fainting condition, he had always thought of it as extending interminably for thousands upon thousands of miles. Now, to his intense surprise, he found the trip a remarkably easy one. By noon they had reached the top of the spiral shaft. In a few moments they were at its bottom. And a half hour more brought them to the caves of eternal fire, and the throne room of the Spider.

After a slight wait, Mayhew was ushered into the presence of his excellency. In view of the fact that everything else had appeared to diminish in impressiveness since his first arrival at these mountains, he half expected that the same would hold true of the Spider.

But it did not. The creature squatted, as repulsive and terrifying as ever, on its skull-topped throne of red marble. Again the hair rose involuntarily on the nape of the young man's neck at the awful sight.

At one side of the throne there stood a crystal globe on a steel pedestal. Clutched in his claws, the Spider held a scroll of parchment which he appeared to be perusing.

Mayhew waited until the creature glanced up. Then placing right hand upon left shoulder, according to the Muian custom, he bowed low before the throne.

But the Spider stiffened, and flashed a baleful glance at him, hissing out, "What now, Tolofo, cannot you forget your former nationality?"

Adams Mayhew did some quick thinking. Glancing around, yet without moving his head to indicate that he was doing so, he noted that the two attendants who had led him into the presence of their ruler were both standing erect with right arm extended straight forward, palm to the front.

Instantly he whipped into the same position, stammering, "Your excellency will forgive the fact that your august appearance awed me into a long-accustomed gesture of humility."

The face of the Spider softened into a toothy leer.

"A pretty speech, Tolofo," said he. "But now let us get down to business. I hear that you lost one of your slaves. How did it happen?"

The story which Adams Mayhew then related was one which had been carefully thought up by him on his trek hither across the mountains. It was quite simple, namely a true account of the breaking of the sea-wall, and the subsequent rescue of all the members of the squad except one. But the teller was Tolofo, rather than Adams Mayhew; the missing man was Adamo Mayho, rather than Tolofo; and the story ended right at that point.

"So I led the rest of them back to their cell, sent word to the boss, and drew an extra ration of wine for them. That is all, your excellency."

The Spider fixed him with a piercing stare from beady black eyes. Then lowered his gaze and perused the scroll.

Mayhew shifted his feet uneasily. Had this uncanny creature seen through his deception?

Finally the Spider again looked up at him.

"Tolofo," said he, "something tells me that you are lying to me." He paused to let that sink in; then continued, "And yet your record gives me no cause to suspect you. You are unquestionably a fugitive from the justice of Mu, and thus cannot possibly be conspiring with the empire against me. Since joining my order you have been frank and independent, almost too frank and too independent at times. I know all about your having befriended this Adamo Mayhew; but then there is nothing to indicate that you knew that he was a henchman of the magistrate Julo, who has been plotting my downfall. Julo, the very same judge who convicted you! Had you known that, you would not have befriended Mayho, I feel sure."

"I thank your excellency," murmured Mayhew, inclining his head slightly.

"Don't thank me too quickly," bristled the Spider. Then to the guards, "Take him away, while I meditate on what disposition to make of his case."

CHAPTER XI

THROUGH THE CRYSTAL

ADAMS MAYHEW did not have long to wait for the decision of the Spider. In a very few minutes he was summoned back into the stalactite encrusted throne room.

This time he made the proper salute, and the squat creature on the throne grinned appreciatively.

"You improve," said he. "How would you like to work for me, Tolofo?"

What new trap was this?

"I do not understand," Mayhew replied guardedly. "Already I have served your excellency faithfully for a matter of six moons."

The Spider bristled.

"Fool!" he hissed. "I mean my personal service."

"The honor overwhelms me."

"You sneer at me!" fairly screamed the Spider, convulsively gripping the arms of the throne with his taloned fingers. Then relaxing, as his mood shifted, he grinned toothily, and said, "But no, I keep forgetting that you are Tolofo, the frank, the truthful. So I believe you."

For the second time that afternoon, Mayhew murmured, "I thank your excellency."

But still he kept his eyes open and his wits alert for some trap.

Again the monarch's mood shifted. Suddenly clapping his hands, "Out of here! Away, all of you. I would speak with Tolofo alone."

The yellow courtiers hurried away. In an instant the cavern was deserted, save for the repulsive creature squatting on the blood-red throne, and the stalwart young American seaman who stood before him.

"And now, Tolofo," said the Spider, "you may sit at my feet."

Lest he irritate the monarch, Mayhew obeyed. The crippled hunchback became almost human. Leaning forward, he gazed down upon the man at his feet with as ingratiating a smile as his twisted features would permit.

"Tell me, Tolofo," he simpered, "am I handsome and awe-inspiring?"

Mayhew played a hunch.

"No, your excellency," he replied with simple directness. "You are never handsome. And for the moment you deign not to be awe-inspiring, although usually you are."

The Spider's hands clenched, and his eyes narrowed. Then he laughed a mirthless cackling laugh.

"You're refreshing," he said. "Oh, these fools, these yellow fools! *They* would have said that I was beautiful. Yet, if I thought myself beautiful, why would I have chosen as my symbol and emblem the repulsive spider which I resemble? And I am glad to learn from your lips that occasionally, when I try, I can cease to be awe-inspiring. Much as I hate your accursed race, I need a *white* man, to tell me the truth. Yes, that shall be your job, Tolofo, to stand at the right hand of the Spider, and tell him the truth! Rise now, and stand beside me."

Mayhew did so. The Spider clapped his hands, and his attendants returned.

"Take this man," he directed them, "and clothe him in black tights and a black jersey like unto mine, and a sword and pouch on an iron chain. And give him an apartment next to mine."

So Mayhew was led away, and duly bathed and clothed and fed. Then, in a small cave which he was informed was to be his; he lay down on luxurious rugs to sleep. But before he slept he resolved that he would use his new position to work the undoing of this monster who menaced the race which had befriended him.

HE WAS awakened by an attendant with a lighted torch. How long he had slept he had no means of knowing, for all hours of the day and night seem alike when one is living underground; but he felt thoroughly rested, and the attendant informed him that it was morning.

Breakfast was served him in his quarters.

Then the attendant brought him shears, a razor, hot water, soap and a polished steel mirror. Mayhew, fearful lest some one might recognize him without his bushy blond beard, merely trimmed it into some semblance of neatness and regularity.

Word was brought that the Spider wished to see him, and he was led into the presence of his excellency.

"Stand by my right hand," the creature snapped. Then, when Mayhew had taken the invited position, "Have you traveled much, Tolofo?"

Mayhew did some quick thinking, but could form no idea of what he might be letting himself in for. When in doubt, tell the truth. Mayhew did so.

"Excellency," said he, "I have sailed this sea, and have landed on many of its shores, including the continent which has no name. But never have I visited any part of Mu, other than the City of Gold."

"So you have visited the continent which has no name? Um! Some day I shall have you take me there, if you have the brain to learn worluk. Also there may be parts of the Golden City which you can penetrate for me. Let us begin at once. Bring me that globe, and place it at the foot of the throne."

Mayhew brought the crystal sphere, on its black pedestal. The Spider leaned forward, brushed one taloned hand across his parchment forehead, and then gazed intently into the limpid depths. A white-fanged smile broke across his thin, cruel lips.

"My, what a perfect specimen," he breathed. "Look, Tolofo, can you see what I see?"

Mayhew stared steadily into the crystal globe, then ran his fingers through his sandy hair.

"Excellency, I see nothing," he was forced to admit.

"Place the fingertips of your left hand upon my brow."

The young man did so. At once the clear glass clouded to a milky, pearly

hue, which then began to whirl and churn like the lava of Pele. In the midst of this iridescent confusion there appeared a shapeless black blob.

"It looks like a spider," said Mayhew, feeling that some remark was expected.

The sinister monarch laughed.

"It is not, but it soon shall be," he cackled. Then clapping his hands, he commanded, "Bring the worluk powder."

Attendants came running in with a flat iron bowl, which they placed on the cavern floor before the throne. Then one of them plucked a torch from its niche in the wall and dipped the lighted end into the bowl. The contents began to smoke, a thick white cloud, which rose only to a height of ten or twelve feet, and then stopped abruptly, to rise no further.

The Spider brushed Mayhew to one side. Then, gripping the arm of the throne with his left hand, he extended his right hand toward the pillar of smoke, and began to wave his fingers at it.

As if actually carved and shaped by the motions of that clawlike hand, the smoke bulged and solidified into a perfect sphere, which then gradually cleared until it became hazily translucent, resembling a huge ball of glass draped with a thin net of gray gauze.

The Spider scowled, and concentrated an intent stare upon this huge sphere, still weaving his fingers before him. Mayhew gasped, for a picture was taking shape within this immense gazing-crystal of smoke, a picture like the formless mass which he had just seen in the lesser crystal, when his fingertips had been pressed to the brow of the Spider.

The black blob formed, but now Mayhew could discern what it was. It was the back view of the naked torso and head of a man—a black man—seated on some steps in the courtyard of a Muian house. Every detail became as distinct as though the scene were actually located within the cavern throne room, separated from the watchers only by a thin and transparent drapery.

The Spider hissed a sharp command, "Bring me two of my most powerful assassins, armed with small clubs." Then to Mayhew, "I shall show you how we recruit our slaves."

Two burly yellow brutes came running, each holding in his right hand a leather covered metal billy.

"You see that Negro?" directed the Spider, pointing to the vision. "I want him, silently and unharmed."

The two thugs gave the customary Roman salute; then, to the intense surprise of the American, they dashed through the curtain of haze which separated the throne room from the garden scene. The Negro, as though startled by some slight sound, quickly turned his head, but down crashed two clubs on his upturned brow and he slumped insensible to the pavement of the courtyard.

Quickly and lithely the two yellow men dragged the black body through the curtain, to the foot of the throne, and again saluted their ruler. He waved his hand as though brushing away something; then ran his fingers tiredly across his eyes, and sank back upon his red marble throne. The ball of smoke and its vision faded and vanished. But the Negro still lay sprawled before them.

"That," announced the Spider wearily, "is worluk. But it is very exhausting." Then, to the two assassins, who were standing expectant, "Take him to the tunnel gangs."

Their faces fell. Probably they had been hoping to see this choice morsel fed to the eternal fires of Pele.

As the two yellow men picked up the still unconscious Negro, Mayhew got his first good view of the black man's face, and had difficulty in suppressing a gasp of recognition. For the Negro was Moorfi, faithful Moorfi, who had been his servant in the household of Julo.

"A favor, most gracious excellency," he said. "I am much impressed with the splendid physique of the slave. May I have him for my personal attendant?"

The Spider looked at Mayhew with a queer look.

"Did you not recognize the scene?"

"No."

"It was the courtyard of the house of Julo, whom you hate because he was the magistrate who sentenced you. Do you not fear a servant of Julo?"

That was so. In his guise as Tolofo, Mayhew was supposed to hate Julo, actually his friend and benefactor.

"This Negro may never have heard of me. I will sound him out!"

"Very well. But you take a dangerous chance. Be careful, for you are likely to prove of value to me."

So the Negro was carried away to Mayhew's quarters.

ATTENDANTS brought the Spider a large goblet, from which he drank.

"Have some?" he proffered. "It's sea

water, my favorite liquor. Besides being very refreshing, my partaking of it symbolizes the union of Ocean and Pele, which I hope some day to accomplish."

Mayhew shook his head.

"I thank your excellency," he said, "but one who has sailed as much as I have grows to dislike salt water."

The Spider frowned at him. The frown became a diabolical leer. The taloned hands clutched the two arms of the throne. The yellow face became livid, then gray. The little squat, hunched-up frame shook and quivered, as with some intense emotion.

Mayhew stepped back aghast, and as he did so the Spider rose from his seat, and, with a gurgling gulp, flung himself at the retreating American.

But the move was feebly made. The monarch slumped to the floor and rolled over onto his back, where he lay sprawled out, with his head painfully twisted and his eyes staring wide and sightlessly above him. His whole body flopped and twitched like a fish in the bottom of a boat. His thin lips, drawn back over sharp fangs, were flecked with pink foam, which pulsated and bubbled in unison with his groans.

The attendants fled shrieking.

Quick as a flash Mayhew sensed the trouble. One of his shipmates on the barque Alaska had been subject to just such seizures. It was epilepsy.

So, gingerly approaching the writhing creature, he turned it over onto its belly, whipped off his own jersey, folded it up, and placed it beneath the creature's face to ease the pounding of the crooked features against the hard stone floor of the cavern.

Then he held the body from rolling over in its convulsions, and waited. There was nothing else to do.

Gradually the paroxysms subsided, and the slaty cheeks resumed their normal yellow hue. The Spider coughed and spat, then nodded his head feebly and smiled a sickly smile.

"Your excellency is all right again," said Mayhew in an encouraging tone.

The Spider pushed himself into a sitting posture by means of his long arms and nodded his head.

"Support me," he said. "Kneel down behind me, and let me lean against you."

Mayhew did as directed. It required all his self-control to suppress a shudder of revulsion as that obscene body rested upon his breast.

For a few moments the Spider lay back and panted.

After a while Mayhew suggested, "I think your excellency is now well enough to stand up and return to the throne."

The vulture head turned on its short neck and regarded him over one shoulder with a wry smile.

"So you don't know?" said the Spider. "I thought that every one knew. I shall never be well enough to stand. Pick me up and carry me to my throne."

So this world menace was a helpless cripple! A warped but mighty mind, in a warped and impotent body!

Mayhew picked it up in his powerful arms and sprawled it back upon its skull-topped crimson throne.

The Spider regarded him with a look of almost kindness and gratitude.

"You alone, Tolofo," he said, "did not flee in terror from my seizure. I did well when I chose you to stand at my right hand."

"How often do you have these attacks?" asked Mayhew, with real concern in his voice.

"Sometimes two a day. Sometimes not once in many moons."

"May I make a suggestion?"

"Speak."

"Give up the sea water. I had a friend once who had the same trouble, and he found that too much salt always brought it on."

An expression of sadness passed across the frightful face of the Spider.

"I wonder if this symbolizes the failure of my great venture," he mused.

Then his mood changed, and he clapped his hands. Attendants came slinking back shamefacedly.

"I am tired," the monarch announced, "and I would have diversion. Bring me a maiden."

A few minutes later a yellow Oriental girl was led into the cavern. She was daintily and exquisitely formed. The tips of her firm young breasts were covered with tiny cones of burnished steel. From a belt of steel links there hung a loincloth of flaming scarlet. Steel bracelets encircled her perfect arms and legs. Her dark hair was done in a knot, and fastened with many skewers of steel. And she exhaled a perfume of water-heliotrope.

She walked into the room with an air of timidity, mingled with quiet dignity and pride, which clearly indicated that she knew that she had been chosen that

day from among the slave girls to be the bride of the great king.

But it was a king whom she had never seen. As her eyes fell upon that squat creature, sprawled upon his blood-red throne, her face went stark with horror, her fingers curled and tensed and were brought up before her mouth, and then she slumped pitifully to the floor, where she lay sobbing.

"So you don't like me, eh?" snarled the Spider, his lip curling. "You're afraid of me, eh? I'm repulsive to you, am I? Well. I'll *make* you like me. Stand up!"

But she only groaned and sobbed the harder.

Two attendants pulled her to her feet. but she hung limp between them.

"Look at me!"

But she hung her head and averted her gaze.

One of the two attendants slapped her smartly across the face. Mayhew tensed. This was going too far.

CHAPTER XII

THE SPIDER STRIKES

THE Spider turned his vulture face slowly around toward the young man. An inscrutable smile played across his features.

"Curb your natural chivalry for a moment," he said, "and you will see that I mean the maiden no harm." Then to the attendants, "Slap her again!"

One of them did so. The beautiful yellow girl opened her eyes and stared at the mad monarch for an instant. With a quick gesture he extended his right hand toward her, its fingers rigid, and waved it with a slight quiver. Instantly her body stiffened and her stare became fixed and vacant. The two attendants let go of her, and she stood alone.

"Come, my dear," cooed the Spider, in as seductive a voice as he was capable of.

Like a sleepwalker she advanced to the throne. She crawled into the lap of the repulsive creature seated there. She laid her cheek against his with a contented little sigh, and began running her slim fingers caressingly over his face and head and arms.

"I would be alone," he said simply, and Adams Mayhew and the other attendants left the room.

At his quarters, Mayhew found the huge Negro sitting up and staring stupidly around. Not a sign of recognition did Moorfi give him.

Mayhew closed the door and said in a low voice, "Quiet, now, and show no surprise. I am Adams Mayhew."

The Negro arose incredulously.

Finally he smiled and said, "For the love of the good Ra, I believe you're right. But what are you doing here?"

"Spying on the Spider. He thinks that I am Tolofo, a fugitive from Julo's justice. Have you ever heard of Tolofo?"

"Can't say that I ever have."

"Well, stick to that story. Are Julo and Marta well?"

"Perfectly."

"And Eleria?"

The Negro grinned.

"Nicely too. But she won't have anything to do with Porto. Still thinks you and he are the same fellow."

"So Porto is safe? Did he tell what happened at Tirio's castle?"

"Only to Julo. 'Fraid any one else would think he was crazy with all this talk of spider-men appearing and disappearing and all that. And as for your disappearing, that story certainly wouldn't be believed, for every one knows that you and Porto are the same fellow. And now you're somebody else, again. Can't you be yourself for a little while?"

"I'm afraid I'm doomed to spend the rest of my life in one impersonation after another," Mayhew wryly replied.

"Well, doesn't it beat all! It reminds me of a story of two sea-captains—"

But Mayhew cut off the narrative with, "And what has become of that rat-faced centurion?"

"Oh, Tirio's back running around the city again. He and Porto called off the blood feud, on account of having fought the spider-men together. But how did you get here?"

"The same way you did."

"And how is that? I was unconscious when it happened."

"It's a long story. Keep your eyes open, and you may learn how. You are to be my servant while we're here."

"While we're here?" quoted Moorfi with a grimace. "No one ever gets out of the clutches of the Spider."

"I mean to," said Mayhew grimly. Then, "Does Eleria see much of Tirio?"

"No, she doesn't speak to him either. But sooner or later she'll make up with either him or Porto, and then the blood feud will be on again. They're both in love with her."

Mayhew groaned.

"Just think!" he exclaimed. "Here am I, and Eleria is a hundred miles away with those two men."

"You wouldn't want her to be here, would you?"

And Adams Mayhew, remembering what he had just seen in the throne room of the Spider, answered an emphatic, "No!"

Then he cautioned Moorfi always to address him as "Tolofo." A slight slip of the tongue by the faithful black, and he and his master might both go to feed the eternal fires of Pele.

EVIDENTLY the little yellow girl kept the Spider amused for the rest of that day, for he did not again send for Adams Mayhew.

But the following day, and for many days thereafter, the supposed Tolofo was in attendance on his sovereign a large part of the time. And always he sought to ingratiate himself, and to learn as much as he could of the methods and plans of the sinister Spider.

Daily he practiced worluk, until whenever he pressed his finger tips on the brow of his patron, he was able to see in the crystal globe whatever the Spider envisioned there. Sometimes he would even almost succeed in forming visions of his own, but they never were quite distinct, nor could he ever completely shape the gray smoke from the iron bowl.

The Spider also offered to teach him how to tame the yellow girls of the harem, and how to bend their wills to his pleasure, but this Mayhew refused to try. And, although the Spider obscenely twitted him for his chivalry, the old creature did not press the point. But Mayhew did see many beautiful maidens come before the Spider and recoil from their fate in stark horror, only to be reduced to doll-like automatons by a few waves of his taloned hand.

By means of the mind and memory of the Spider, projected into the crystal gazing-globe, Adams Mayhew paid optical visits to many parts of the empire of Mu. And often when the ball of transparent smoke was formed, he witnessed assassinations and kidnapings.

But he learned that this powerful alchemist whom he served was limited and hampered in many ways. The Spider could see in the crystal sphere, and contact by means of the ball of smoke, only such places as he had formerly visited in the flesh. And not even all of those, but only such as had particularly impressed themselves upon him when he had visited them. Also, although he could project his minions through the curtain of worluk smoke into actual presence in the scenes which he was envisioning, yet he could not pass through the smoke-screen himself.

And his infirmity kept him pretty well tied down to the throne room cavern and his adjoining quarters. It was almost pathetic how he longed to travel, to visit parts of the world which he had never seen, and in particular to visit other parts of the continent of Mu. This longing would have been actually pathetic, had it been due to a desire to mingle with his fellow men. But it was actuated by a fiendish wish to extend his occult power by adding to the spots which he could summon to sight in the visions of his crystal globe, and into which he could launch his assassins through the medium of the magic smoke.

Moorfi was occasionally present, in attendance on his master, at some of these seances, but Mayhew kept him away as much as possible, lest he make some break which would reveal to the Spider Mayhew's true identity. The reason which Mayhew gave to the Spider, however, was that Moorfi might see an attack on some former friend of his, and attempt to interfere. This explanation not only served to excuse Moorfi's absence, but also still further established Mayhew's devotion to the cause. And this was to come in very handy at a later date.

ONE day, after the American had become proficient in reading the Spider's crystal-visions, by the mental rapport induced by the pressure of finger tips of the one on the brow of the other, the mad monarch summoned him to attend one of his daily seances.

"Ah, Tolofo," remarked the Spider, "touch my forehead quickly, if you would see a most beautiful girl. Of course, I know that you are cold to the charms of the little darlings of my own yellow race. But here is a white beauty, who will quicken even your sluggish pulse."

Mayhew shrugged his shoulders and placed the tips of the fingers of his left hand upon the brow of his patron. The crystal-clear globe clouded with a pearly haze, which straightway began to swirl and twist before his eyes, soon becoming

a kaleidoscopic vortex of peacock hues.

Then gradually the vision cleared and took form. It was a street scene in the Golden City.

And in the midst of the street stood the beautiful Eleria!

Adams Mayhew gasped, and his fingers trembled on the brow of the Spider. The latter leered up at him, and said, "I thought that that would interest even you. Shall I send for her through the ball of smoke, to be a plaything for you here in these dismal caves?"

What could Mayhew reply? He could not disclaim his interest, which had been all too evident. He certainly did not wish to subject Eleria to captivity here; but, on the other hand, neither did he wish to leave her in the Golden City within reach of his two rivals.

As his mind struggled to frame an appropriate answer to the offer of the Spider, the latter suddenly pushed Mayhew away, and shouted, "Quick! Bring worluk. He comes! The man whom I have been seeking these many moons."

The vision swirled and vanished. Gone was Eleria. But also, with this swift shift of the mad monarch's mood, was gone the necessity of replying to his question.

Slaves came running with the iron bowl of powder, which they promptly ignited. The smoke billowed upward, and took shape at the wave of a clawlike hand. The same street scene appeared in the midst of the smoke, with Eleria still standing there.

But there was one addition. Down the street toward her was swaggering the rat-faced Tirio, in his blue bordered centurion's tunic. Eleria was smiling, and seemed glad to see the newcomer, who saluted and stopped to chat with her.

Mayhew set his jaw and clenched his fists, and the Spider, glancing up at him for an instant, grinned approval.

But then the centurion began to move away.

The Spider clapped his hands in command, and shrieked, "Where are those assassins? Why aren't they here? My man escapes me!"

Attendants scattered to seek out the cause of the delay, but no assassins appeared.

"Quick, Tolofo, you!" shrieked the Spider. "Into the smoke and seize him for me!"

And such was the hypnotic power of that command that Mayhew leaped forward without thought or hesitation; and, passing through the curtain of smoke, he grappled with his old enemy.

THE cavern throne room vanished, and Mayhew was back in the Golden City. And, as on the day of his first arrival there, he was engaged in a hand-to-hand combat with Tirio, the centurion.

Although his onslaught had taken his enemy completely by surprise, yet the latter fought with the ferocity of a cornered rat. In a few minutes Mayhew was down on his back, with Tirio sitting astride him, the hands of each locked on the arms of the other.

"What's the matter with you?" Tirio panted. "Who are you, with your bushy yellow beard, and that strange black costume? I've seen your face before, but your beard hides most of it. You look like Porto, but he was clean-shaven yesterday. If you are Porto, desist; for the blood feud is off."

For reply, Mayhew gave a heave, and the struggle resumed. Tirio reached for his sword. But a warning shout, "Beware, Tolofo!" came from the air above. Mayhew had a momentary vision of a yellow man in a red tunic stooping down and snatching the blade from Tirio's hand.

Tirio blanched.

"So you are Tolofo," he gasped, "turned spider-man, and come back for revenge. I swear that it wasn't I who framed that case against you. Help! Police!"

Mayhew thought of the Biblical proverb, "The wicked flee when no man pursueth," and smiled grimly. So it was Tirio who had been responsible for the undeserved exile of the dead overseer. One more debt which the rat-faced one must be made to pay! But how could this ever be accomplished?

Quite a crowd had gathered by now. Eleria was no longer in evidence. In a moment the police would be here, in response to Tirio's frantic calls for help.

Then the supposed Tolofo would have to go back to jail; and if he should declare himself to be Adams Mayhew, this disclosure would in no way diminish the hatred of the centurion, who would take great pains that word of the prisoner's true identity should not get out. Mayhew was in a fix. The only solution seemed to be to kill his opponent before help came, for with the death of Tirio would die all suspicion that Mayhew was the escaped convict, Tolofo. So, with grim despera-

tion, he clutched now for Tirio's throat.

And then he felt a strange inexplicable pull on him, as from a gigantic magnet. As he wrestled with his opponent, each turn and twist and roll seemed to carry the two of them further up the street toward the spot from which the American had first launched his attack. The crowd receded as they rolled.

He heard gruff shouts, "Make way!"

The crowd parted. And then Tirio got his hands on Mayhew's throat. Mayhew's wind was completely cut off. He gasped and strained for breath. A red haze spread over his vision. No longer did he feel the magnetic pull.

Then the hands of his opponent were torn from his throat, and his opponent's body was dragged off of him. With great painful sobs the air came back into his tortured lungs. His vision cleared. Yet still the red color of surrounding objects persisted.

For he was lying on the floor of the throne room cavern of the Spider. His enemy, held in the clutches of two burly yellow brutes, was staring with wide-mouthed horror at the scene.

"Take him away!" waved the Spider. Then to Mayhew, "You did a good job, Tolofo; but if I hadn't sent one of my men to seize Tirio's sword, you would have been done for."

"I thank your excellency for saving my life," breathed Mayhew, getting to his feet and gently feeling of his neck where his opponent's hands had been. "What do you plan to do with the victim? Feed him to the eternal flames of Pele?"

Mayhew grinned as he said this. Not because of any personal joy at thus getting rid of his enemy and rival, for he would take no pleasure in the cold blooded slaughter of even such a one as Tirio; but rather because there suddenly flashed through his mind a realization of irony of playing off against each other these two enemies of the government, so each would destroy the other.

But the Spider's reply suddenly shocked him out of his complacency.

It was, "Certainly not! Haven't I told you that I have been trying for many moons to get him here, so that I can propose an alliance to him?"

Instead of having helped the government of Mu, Mayhew had assisted in what might prove to be its undoing! The only crumb of comfort to this situation was that he had at least separated Tirio and Eleria.

"Well," announced the Spider, "let's do some more fishing."

And he stared again into the crystal globe.

At that instant one of the attendants announced a man, seeking audience; and the Spider commanded that the man be brought in. The newcomer was small and yellow, but well muscled. He carried a spear.

After the customary Roman salute he looked askance at Mayhew and said, "I'd rather not have him present. What I have to say is for the ears of your excellency alone."

"You will speak in the presence of any one I choose to have present," snapped the Spider. "Proceed."

Still looking at Mayhew furtively out of the corner of his eye, the man said, "But, your excellency, what I have to say is that this fellow beside you is *not* Tolofo, but an impostor!"

All this while, Mayhew had been racking his brains to identify the man, whose face seemed strangely familiar.

Meanwhile the Spider was snarling his reply, "That is a rash charge, Koko; and, if you cannot substantiate it, it will mean for you the fate to which you have pushed so many others." Then, turning to Mayhew, "What say you, Tolofo?"

The Spider's remarks had finally given the American his clue. This man was the one who had quarreled with Tolofo over his kindness to Adams Mayhew.

Mayhew shrugged his shoulders as he replied, "It is what I might expect from Koko, your excellency. He and I never got along together during all the time that we were spearmen at the eternal fires of Pele. I have heard rumors that he jealously resented my promotion to foremanship, and again when you honored me by elevating me to this post by your side."

"Koko," snapped the Spider. "Where did you get this insane idea?"

"In a message from one of Tolofo's own squad at the excavations, your excellency. The message stated that Tolofo is dead, and that this person at your side is none other than the slave, Adamo Mayho."

"What say you, Tolofo?"

Again Mayhew shrugged his shoulders, as he replied, "I tried to be fair and merciful to my men, your excellency. Several of them, misinterpreting my kindness, approached me to let them go over the hill. Naturally I refused. This yarn is probably revenge for that re-

fusal. Also possibly an attempt to implicate me, before I report them."

"You should have reported the episode at once when it happened, Tolofo," snapped the Spider.

"Your excellency, the episode occurred the night before I was summoned here. I overlooked it in the excitement of moving."

"Very well. Your explanations are satisfactory. As for this lying troublemaker of a Koko, take him away and lock him up—until we hear from the slave who started the accusation. He, the slave, is to be sent for at once."

The informer wilted and was dragged away. And an ominous gloom settled over Adams Mayhew.

But the Spider did not notice this change in the mien of his favorite, for he at once turned his interrupted attention back to the gazing-sphere.

"Your fingers!" he commanded.

And Adams Mayhew once more established rapport with the mind of his patron. Once more the limpid depths curdled, then swirled, then cleared, this time disclosing the courtyard of the house of Julo. As they gazed beautiful Eleria entered the scene. Her cameo face was distrait, her dainty hands clasped upon her breast, and she was panting.

Julo—suave, majestic and kindly—entered the courtyard. Excitedly the girl rushed over to him, placed both her hands upon his shoulders and looked up appealingly into his face. Of course, the two watchers could not hear what she was saying, but it was evident that she was recounting the abduction of Tirio which she had recently witnessed.

"Once more this pearl of a white girl plays into our hands," announced the Spider gleefully. "Once more she lures a victim into my web. Quick, the worluk, and four assassins!"

"But, your excellency," objected Mayhew, horrified, "surely you do not plan to kill that girl! What has she ever done to you?"

The Spider grinned as he replied, "No, no. Merely Julo. He is an enemy who has long escaped me."

Mayhew groaned inwardly. Here was his best friend about to be slaughtered, and he was powerless to prevent it.

The assassins arrived. The bowl of powder was brought and lighted. The globe of transparent smoke was formed by a few waves of the alchemist's hands. Julo's back was turned.

"Go get him!" hissed the Spider, and the four thugs, with daggers up-raised, leapt from the red-lit cavern into the courtyard of Julo.

But after them leapt Adams Mayhew.

"Kataka, Julo!" he shouted, shoving the nearest assassin aside.

Julo turned, just in time to seize the wrist of one descending dagger hand. Then he and Mayhew and the four spider-men went down together in a heap.

"Help!" shouted Julo, and black servants came running.

One of them seized Mayhew and dragged him off the heap.

"Don't you know me?" gasped the American. "I'm Adams Mayhew. Let me alone, and help Julo."

"You're one of these vanishing spider-men, that what you are," retorted the Negro, "and I'm helping my master right now by keeping you off of him." He lunged at Mayhew. In self-defense, the latter was forced to grapple with him. But the American was no match for the black, who quickly got the upper hand.

Then once again Mayhew felt the magnetic drawing force of the will of the Spider, slowly causing him to ooze out from beneath the body of the Negro, and to rematerialize in the red-lit throne room of the volcanic caverns.

He had saved Julo—that is, he hoped he had—and now he was being pulled back to the lair of the Spider, there to pay the penalty for thwarting the plans of the monster. Doubtless he would speedily be thrown to Pele, and this time there would be no escape.

CHAPTER XIII

MU STRIKES BACK

STRANGE to relate, more than he feared for his own fate, Mayhew regretted that all the spying which he had done on the plans of the Spider would now go to waste. And also that he would never see Eleria again.

So with all his might he clung to the body of the Negro, and opposed his own will-power to that of the Spider, striving desperately not to be sucked back through the ball of smoke into the cavern, where sat the monster on his skull-topped, blood-red throne.

But, despite his efforts both physical and mental, the sunlight gradually became a reddish glare, the weight of the

black body upon him gradually became more tenuous and unreal. He could even dimly see the squat figure of the Spider, seated on his crimson marble throne, his arms stretched out, pulling Adams Mayhew back into his clutches.

Then something snapped. The figure on the throne pitched forward toward him, a fishy, vacant look upon its face. The cavern faded. The sunlight reappeared. Adams Mayhew was lying on the flagging of the courtyard of Julo's home, beneath a burly Negro who was trying to throttle him.

"Get up!" snapped an authoritative voice. "Get up, Tombi. What have you there?"

At the same instant Mayhew felt a tug at his waist.

"Watch out, sir," the Negro replied. "This is a spider-man, and he's armed."

"I'm watching out," said the voice, "and I've taken his sword. Get up."

The Negro cautiously let go of Mayhew and got to his feet. Mayhew also rose, and faced the frowning Julo.

"Well," said the latter, smiling grimly, "at last we have secured a specimen. That is, unless suddenly you vanish like the rest."

"Get me out of here, and into some bedroom," Mayhew urged, "and then I'll not vanish. The Spider has no power in places where he has never been."

And he made a dash for one of the surrounding doorways.

A Negro stepped to intercept him, but Julo commanded, "Let him go, and follow."

Safely within the room Mayhew halted, and panted, "He can send his assassins in here from the courtyard, but he cannot drag me back, and they can expect no aid from him while out of his sight."

"But who are you?" asked Julo, with a puzzled frown.

"I'm Adams Mayhew."

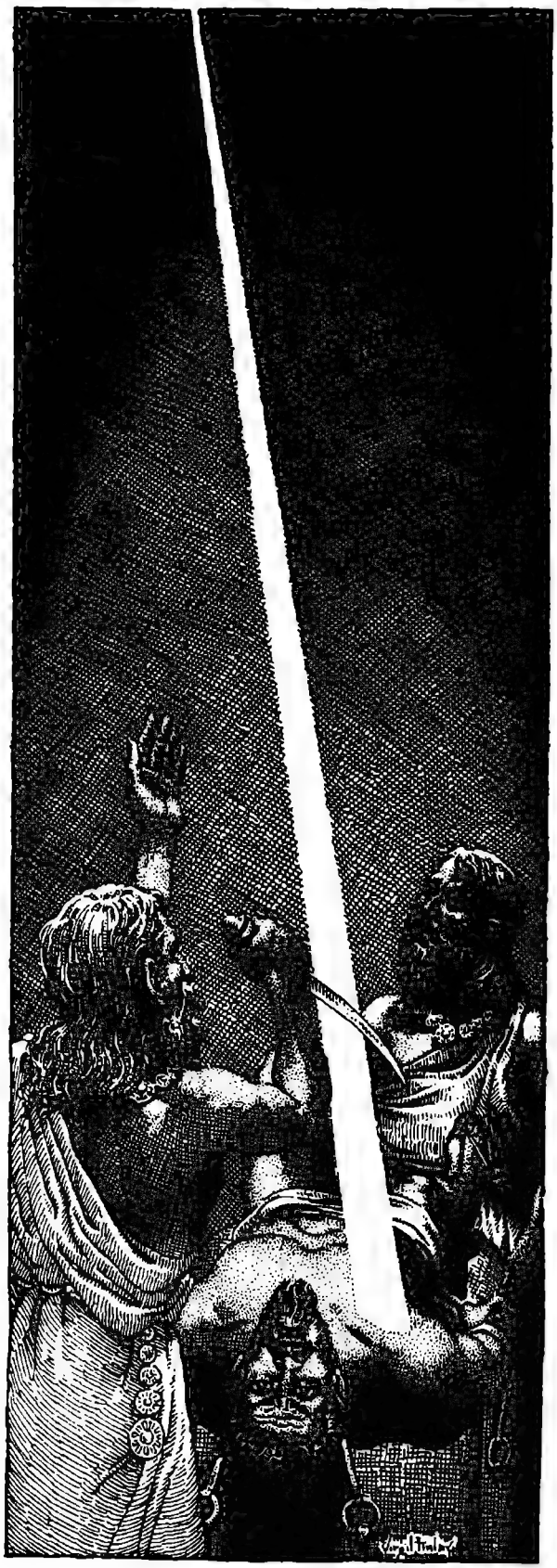
Julo walked over and inspected him carefully. Then burst into a laugh, a rather sheepish one.

"I believe you are, at that," said he. "Well, of all the amazing turns of fate! Eleria, come and see who's here. It's an old friend of yours."

But there was no reply.

"Where is Eleria?" Julo demanded of the servants, but she was nowhere to be found.

Suddenly a realization dawned on Adams Mayhew. The assassins of the Spider had taken her back with them.



"Oh, Ra, sang the priest, "shine thy approval on this offering which we bring to thee!" Mayhew watched the knife, knowing that when the ray reached the position above his heart, his chest would be opened with one swift stroke

He sank to a bench and held his face in his hands. For he was thinking of the fate, which he had witnessed, of the little yellow girls in the harem of the Spider, and he was picturing the same fate meted out to Eleria!

At length he roused himself and turned a haggard face to Julo, who stood looking down at him with deep and kindly concern.

"I know," said the magistrate. "You don't need to tell me. Our little friend has vanished with the spider-men. Perhaps she has gone to the fate from which you have just saved me."

"Worse than that, sir," replied Mayhew soberly. Then briefly he sketched the hypnotic love-powers of the Spider.

"Well, you have seen the creature face to face, and have survived," said Julo. "Others can do the same."

"But that doesn't save Eleria," gloomily replied the American.

"Maybe it does. Tell me all you know, and then we can make our plans."

So Mayhew rapidly sketched what he knew of the personality, powers, forces and ambitions of the Spider, together with his own history since his disappearance from the castle of Tirio. Julo had already learned from Moorfi of the original kidnaping, and from Porto of the fighting at the castle.

When Mayhew concluded, Julo clapped him on the shoulder, and said, "Well, at last we know who, what and where the Spider is. You have brought us more information as the result of a few months' work on your part, than the entire secret service of the Empire of Mu has been able to glean in as many years. Let me congratulate you."

"You say you know who the Spider is. Who is he?"

"Many years ago, shortly before we began to hear rumors of the menace of the Spider, a paralyzed hunchback, a great scientist, of the yellow race, visited this city, to demand from the government a high official position, in recognition of his scientific attainments. I remember his calling at my house, and being carried into the courtyard. His request was refused and, threatening reprisals, he went back to his own city. Soon thereafter his death was reported, and the government breathed more easily, for he was a brilliant man with considerable of a personal following. But it now appears that he did not die."

"But what about Eleria?"

"Fortunately Mu and Eleria can be served by the same move. I shall organize a secret force and attack his stronghold. You can act as our guide. We shall move first to the fjord where you labored as a slave. There we shall put a stop to his excavations. I can't imagine what they are for, but undoubtedly their purpose is sinister. Then you can lead us to the shaft which gives entrance to his underground domains. Through that shaft we shall enter, put an end to the Spider, and rescue Eleria. Now that we know the source and nature of his powers, they need no longer terrify us."

"He may possess other powers."

"You saw no indications of any in all the months that you were with him?"

"No."

"And his forces appear to be small?"

"Yes. Very small."

"Then on with the attack!"

Mayhew next gave his host a list of all the places in the city which he remembered having seen through the crystal globe of the Spider.

For fear that information of Mayhew's return might eventually find its way to the ears of the enemy, he was taken to the jail and locked up there under the name of Tolofo. But many were the conferences held in his cell.

Thither, among others, came Porto. At first he and Mayhew were rather cool to each other, but one day Julo got the two of them together, and spoke to them in a fatherly way.

He said, "You are both in love with Eleria." They glared at each other. "And so is Tirio." They glared at Julo. "And so most likely is the Spider. In fact, it is hard to conceive of any one not succumbing to the charms of so exquisite a creature as she is." A look of horror spread over both of their faces. "I fancy that either of you would rather the other should get her, than to have her fall prey to the Spider, or to his ally Tirio." They nodded. "Then, by the name of Ra, shake hands, and promise each other to stand by the winner against all the world. And may the best man win."

They did so. Porto the Muian and Adams Mayhew the American then became fast friends, although avowed rivals for the hand of Eleria.

Mayhew continued to wear his beard, lest the Spider catch sight of him shaven in the crystal globe, and thus might learn that Adamo Mayho was not dead.

AT LAST the night arrived for the departure of the expedition. Under cover of darkness, Mayhew was smuggled out of the jail and aboard ship. The jailkeeper was instructed to give out word that Tolofo had escaped, for it might later be necessary for Mayhew again to impersonate the dead overseer. He was seen only by the men who shared the same boat with him, and to them he was introduced by his right name, or rather by its Muian variant, "Adamo Mayho."

Two nights later they reached the naval rendezvous off the coast just north of the volcano. There were several hundred boats of the prevailing Muian type, long and low, with triangular, awning-striped sails. These boats, in all, held many picked men.

Although there were many deep fjords along this volcanic northern coast, Mayhew's detailed description of the place where he had worked had led his friends to believe that they could identify the particular chasm. So they drew in close to shore near where they supposed the camp to be, and sent Mayhew with a small party to reconnoiter. It proved to be the correct place, so the party returned to the beach to report, and Mayhew by prearrangement went on alone.

Skirting the headquarters, which was wrapped in slumber, he proceeded until he came to the cave which he had formerly occupied as overseer. It was rather isolated from the rest of the camp, so, without fear of arousing any one but its inmate, he knocked loudly on its door.

After repeated rappings, a sleepy voice inquired, "Who comes?"

"A messenger from headquarters."

"In the name of Pele, what do you want at this late hour of night?"

"I am sent by his excellency to take over your job, and am instructed to stay with you until the transfer has been arranged."

"Have you brought written authority with you?"

"I have."

"Then slip it under the door."

In preparation for just such a request, Mayhew's friends in the Golden City had prepared an appropriate order on parchment, copying the spider-crest and the style of printing from one of the notices which the Spider himself had caused to be posted in the city. The language of the order was largely based upon Mayhew's recollection of the language of similar orders during his term of service with the Spider. Also Mayhew was clad in a careful copy, made from memory, of the spider-crested red tunic, worn by members of the enemy order. But in a bundle he carried a tunic of plain design, for use later in the night.

There were sounds of striking a light within the cave. Then illumination glowed around the edges of the door. Mayhew pushed the parchment underneath and a few moments later heard the sliding of bolts. The door opened and a man peered out.

"Well, well," he boomed. "My old friend, Tolofo! So you have come back to take over the job from which I ousted you. Well, turn about is fair play. Come on in. I hope that I do as well by myself, when I return to his excellency, as you did; but probably it will be just my luck to go back to guarding the fires of Pele. Come in, and make yourself at home."

Mayhew had never seen the man who superseded him. But it was evident that this jovial yellow person had been a friend of Tolofo's and a spearman of Pele. With that to start on, and by being rather guarded in his conversation, he could doubtless escape detection until an opportunity presented itself to slip a knife between this fellow's ribs.

Ugh! He shuddered at the thought of killing in cold blood, and especially such a friendly soul as this! The man appeared to have been a close intimate of Tolofo, and hence probably a decent sort. And now Mayhew must strike down, unarmed and unwarned, the friend of his friend. Every atom of his nature recoiled from the task, yet it was necessary for the cause—and for Eleria.

At the thought of her he shuddered again.

The overseer, noticing this, said, "You are cold, good Tolofo, let me pour you some wine and throw a sleeping mat over your shoulders. The night is damp, and you have come a long way. Have you eaten?"

This was too much! He was to eat and drink at his victim's table, and be tenderly cared for by him. But he must—for Eleria. Chivalry to an enemy has no place when a woman's honor is at stake. Mayhew sat down heavily on a stool by the table.

The yellow man closed and barred the door.

"You seem tired as well as cold," he said in a friendly voice, "but soon I'll have you fixed all right."

He waddled over to a closet, from which he produced a jug and two goblets. These he placed on the table.

"Help yourself," he jovially invited, "while I get you that mat I promised you."

Mayhew poured a glass of wine and raised it to his lips; then hesitated. This was too much! The fellow was being too kind! Mayhew could not drink his wine and then cut him down in cold blood. There must be some other alternative.

With these thoughts he swung suddenly around to face his host. And it was well that he did so, for there stood the man, with dagger upraised, behind Mayhew's stool.

Just in time the American threw himself sidewise to the floor, and down came the dagger, driven deep into the table. The wine jug overturned and gurgled its contents out onto the table top, thence in a narrow stream to the edge and off onto the floor. The stool rolled into a corner.

Catlike, Mayhew sprang to his feet—he had learned that from being knocked into the scuppers aboard the barque Alaska. Drawing his broad-sword he rushed the spider-man. A fierce exultation thrilled him; no longer was it necessary for him to kill in cold blood!

But the other man stepped nimbly back to the wall, snatched his own sword from where its belt and scabbard hung from a peg, and leaped forward again to meet the onslaught of the American.

His agility belied his huge bulk. Parrying Mayhew's first stroke, he swept a return blow; and, as Mayhew stepped back to avoid it, the yellow man with a sudden turn of the wrist caught Mayhew's blade with his, wrenched it from his momentarily slackened grasp, and sent it hurtling into a corner. Then he charged again.

THERE was but one thing for the American to do. Instead of fleeing, he stepped in under the blow, planted his right fist in the fat belly of the overseer and seized the sword wrist with his own left hand.

The fat paunch, however, had plenty of muscle behind its rolls of flesh; so the blow only slightly winded the man. But, combined with a sudden wrench on his wrist, it was sufficient to cause him to drop his sword. Then the two men grappled.

The chunky yellow man not only outweighed the American, he also had more strength and more wrestling skill. And so it was not long before Adams Mayhew's right arm was "in chancery," pulled up behind his back with the hand opposite his shoulder blades. His opponent had him at his mercy, and could easily dislocate his shoulder at will.

Desperate, Mayhew lunged behind him with his left fist, but his opponent deftly caught it, and now had both of Mayhew's arms in chancery. Then the man began pushing him toward the table, where the dagger still stuck, imbedded in the wood. The purpose was evident. Mayhew braced his feet against the floor and strained backward, but the yellow man bunted him with his knee, forcing him forward.

The time for fighting was over; the time for temporizing and persuasion had arrived.

"What have you got against me?" asked Mayhew. "We used to be good friends."

"I've nothing at all against you," the other replied. "But I don't want you to get my job. My return to the court of his excellency might not result in promotion like yours did. And I've no intention of becoming a mere spearman again, if I can help it."

"But what excuse can you give for my death?"

"None; and I shan't have to. I'll heave your body into the fjord and say that you never arrived."

"It will go hard with you, if you are even suspected of my death, for I am a favorite of his excellency."

"It looks like it," sneered the other, "deprived of your soft job, and sent back here to be a foreman."

By this time they had arrived at the table. Mayhew was pushed against the edge, and then the upper part of his body was forced forward, until his chin touched the board. His captor then grasped both of his wrists with one fat hand and the other reached for the dagger.

It was Mayhew's last chance for life. Desperately he leaned his entire weight on the table and kicked backward with both feet.

The fat yellow man was not taken by surprise, however, and braced his own feet to withstand the shove. But he had forgotten the dripping wine. He was standing in a puddle of the slippery liquid, and his feet gave way and slid.

He grabbed the edge of the table to steady himself, and the combined pressure of himself and Mayhew pushed the

table out from under, and the two of them crashed to the floor together.

Mayhew twisted around as he fell, thus landing on his back with his hands free; and, as the overseer came down on top of him, he drove his right fist squarely to the other's jaw. Then he scrambled to his feet and grabbed the knife.

The overseer slowly and groggily arose, blinked, shook his head, and then lunged forward with a bellow of rage. Mayhew met him with the point of the dagger to his left breast, and the fight was over.

The American drew a couple of deep breaths. But there was no time to lose, as some one might arrive at any moment. So he speedily set about putting the room in order.

First he dragged the body over to the pile of sleeping mats, placed it in a natural position with its back to the door, and covered all but its head with one of the mats. Then he rearranged the upset furniture and mopped up the blood and wine. He was just finishing when there came a peremptory rap on the door.

Stepping over to it, he softly asked, "Who comes?"

"It's the guard from headquarters, on a round of inspection," shouted the voice outside. "Why are your lights lit at this late hour of the night?"

Sliding back the bolts and opening the door a crack, Mayhew replied, "Sh! The overseer is asleep."

The guard entered, glanced at the recumbent figure on the sleeping mats, then stared at Mayhew.

"Then who are you?" he demanded.

"Sh!" the American again replied. "I am the new overseer. Here are my orders assigning me to the command of the third squad. They direct me to spend the night with the overseer of that squad."

The guard glanced at the paper, which it was evident he could not read, and then started to stuff it into his pouch; but Mayhew snatched it away, saying, "No, no! I need those to prove my identity."

"But why didn't you report at headquarters?" grumbled the guard.

"There were no lights there, so I thought I would wait until morning."

The guard departed, still grumbling. As soon as time enough had elapsed for him to complete his rounds, Mayhew took the keys of the dead overseer and set out for the cave which housed his former squad. At the grating he called softly the names of several of them, until at last a light was lit inside and one of the slaves came to the opening.

"By the holy name of Ra, see who's here!" the slave exclaimed. "It's our old pal, Adamo Mayho, come back to us!"

The others, thus aroused, crowded to the entrance. Mayhew checked them over. All his old squad was there, with the exception of one named Meeno; and there was one new face.

He was just about to ask, "What has become of Meeno?" when one of the slaves asked that same question of him.

Mayhew instantly grasped the situation, and replied in an offhand tone, "Oh, he is to be fed to Pele, for presuming to tell the Spider that I am not Tolofo." He paused to let this sink in; then, "But, as for the rest of you, I have returned to keep my promise to set you free."

"Three cheers—" began one of them.

But another clapped a hand over his mouth with a "Be still, you fool!"

Mayhew unlocked the grating and led

them to his own cave, where he distributed swords and knives from his own clothes bundle and from the stock of the dead overseer. Mayhew donned a plain tunic.

He explained to them the plan of campaign, and they extinguished the lights and waited.

THEY had not long to wait, for soon they heard the sound of fighting farther down the ravine, as Julo's army fell upon the sleeping guardhouse and headquarters of the spider-men. Then Mayhew and his little group sallied forth. As each foreman, roused by the confusion, opened the door of his cave to investigate, he was cut down. Then his keys were obtained, and his squad was released to augment Mayhew's forces. Soon all the prisoners were free, and most of them were armed. They then took up a position, blocking the road which led to the volcano, and thus preventing the escape of any spider-men to warn the Spider.

In a few moments it was over; the enemy were wiped out to a man. Then began the silent and cautious advance up the trail, with Mayhew in the lead, showing the way. At this rate, they would reach the shaft, as planned, before daylight. They were jubilant.

But their jubilation was short-lived. As they were passing through a certain small crater-like pocket in the mountains, they began to smell sulphur. They gasped and sneezed. And then, from a thousand jets in the walls of rock, there burst upon them a perfect deluge of noxious gasses.

Mayhew was the first to sense the situation.

"Up! Up!" he urged. "Up the sides, every man of you!"

The orderly advance became a scrambled rout as the men fought their way up the rocky walls. The word "fought" is literally correct, for the men clawed and shoved at each other, forgetting friend and ally in their mad struggle for self-preservation.

Some of the jets of gas became ignited from the torches carried by the expedition. Several explosions were heard. Rocks began to roll down the precipitous cliffs. And molten fire began to pour from many jet-holes.

Adams Mayhew, panting and pain-racked, coughing and straining for breath, reached the top of one of the cliffs. He glanced back down into the inclosure. The entire bowl was lit by the red glare of the streams of lava, and the burning jets of gas, so that he could see clearly the devastation below.

Hundreds of black forms lay huddled at the bottom of the ravine, some crushed by rocks, some singed by fire, some twisted into grotesque shapes by asphyxiation, and some still twitching slightly with expiring life. But not a man was struggling upward.

Around the rim stood many spider-men, silhouettes of red against the velvet sky, still rolling rocks down on those below. Then a gust of poison fumes wafted up from the valley of death, blinding and choking Mayhew, and he fled across the volcanic rocks, away from that awful charnel-house.

CHAPTER XIV

ESCAPE?

HOW long or where he ran, after the sudden destruction of the army of his friends, Mayhew never knew, for the last thing he remembered was turning blindly away from that awful holocaust. There followed a vague treadmill nightmare of stumbling interminably over volcanic rocks in the jet darkness of the night.

Then he awoke to find himself lying on the hard stone floor of a red-lit cavern. He stirred and groaned.

A voice above him hissed, "So, Tolofo, you have come back to me, eh?"

Blinking and rubbing his eyes, Mayhew looked up, to see the Spider leering down at him from his throne.

"Get up!" commanded the Spider.

Mayhew struggled to his feet and feebly gave the Roman salute. The Spider grinned.

"Still game," said he appreciatively; then, "Your friends in the Golden City didn't treat you very well, did they? I did my best to save you, but unfortunately I had one of my seizures just as I was dragging you back to safety through the ball of worluk smoke. Pretty forgiving of me, too, I call it."

"Wh-what was?" stuttered Mayhew, sparring for time.

"My trying to rescue you after you had impulsively spoiled my attack on our enemy Julo. But, of course, I can understand your eagerness to do the killing yourself."

Mayhew's head was beginning to clear, and gradually the astounding realization was being forced upon him that the Spider had misinterpreted his rush through the ball of smoke as an attempt on his part to kill, rather than to rescue, his supposed enemy, Julo. Perhaps, then, the Spider did not suspect him of complicity in last night's happenings; or, more likely, the Spider was merely playing with him, as a cat with a mouse. Even so, the cat's play would mean a few more minutes of life.

The next question of the Spider went far toward solving Mayhew's problem.

"How did the Muians learn the location of my mountain stronghold? Did they extort this information out of you by torture?"

Mayhew drew himself up proudly, and said, with double entendre, "No one can get from me information which I do not choose to give."

"Good!" exclaimed the Spider. "I respect your loyalty. But how, then, did they find out?"

"I have an idea," Mayhew judiciously replied, "for there was a rumor around the prison that some fishermen had seen signs of suspicious activity along the north coast. Spies were sent from the secret service of Julo, to reconnoiter. These confirmed the suspicions, and so the expedition was dispatched."

The Spider thoughtfully nodded his vulture head.

"Yes," he said, "it sounds likely."

Then suddenly, "But how did you get here?"

The question did not take the young man by surprise; he had been expecting it, and had gradually been formulating his answer.

So he said readily enough, "The moment that I learned of this menace to your excellency, I realized the need of getting word to you. So I broke jail—"

"Yes," interrupted the Spider. "I learned as much from my spies. Go on."

Mayhew continued, "—and made a beeline for this volcano."

"But why didn't you go first to some spot which was within my occult powers to drag you here through the worluk smoke? As soon as I heard of your escape, I combed the entire city for you with my crystal globe."

"I thought of that, but dared not risk it, for fear of recapture. So, in two days' time, I reached the mountains. Not knowing any other entrance here than the shaft on the path from the excavations, I made for the sea coast, reaching the path around midnight. My first thought was to warn the guard at the diggings, but I found my way blocked by the advancing forces of the Muians. So I turned and fled before them, and barely escaped being overwhelmed by the gas and flames which Pele providentially sent to engulf them."

"Pele didn't send the flames," snarled the Spider. "I did! I, the greatest living alchemist. But continue."

"What happened after that, I do not know. I found myself lying here."

"You were picked up by one of my patrols. You nearly gave your life to save me; and quite unnecessarily, for my spy system had already warned me. So I trapped the enemy in that sunken valley, and slew them all."

"All?" echoed Mayhew, thinking of Julo and Porto and his other brave friends.

"Every man of them," growled the Spider with satisfaction. "Thus do I crush my enemies."

With superhuman effort, Mayhew forced a look of diabolic glee upon his face.

"Praise be to Pele!" he cried.

"You are tired, Tolofo," solicitously observed the Spider. "Go to your quarters. Bathe, eat, and rest. Then return, for I have urgent work for you to perform."

At his quarters, Mayhew found the faithful Moorfi in attendance. Mayhew's first question was of Eleria.

"Yes, she is here," the Negro replied, "but—praise be to Ra—the Spider has not yet sent for her. You see, Tirio has demanded her as one of the conditions of his allying himself with the Spider."

"Then they are not yet working together?"

"No. And, although the Spider has alternately threatened to throw him to Pele, and promised to share the world with him, he still holds out for Eleria."

"Does Eleria know this?"

"Yes, I believe so."

"Can you get word to her? I dare not try to see her myself."

"I think so."

"Then suggest to her the following plan of escape. Tell her who I am, and that I suggest it. She must save herself from Tirio by telling the Spider that she prefers him to the rat-faced one. This will please and flatter the Spider."

"It is rumored that she has already said as much to Tirio," interpolated Moorfi, with a grin.

Mayhew continued, "She, the peer of them all, will be the first woman ever to come to the Spider voluntarily. When she comes, and before submitting to his loathsome embraces, she must cajole him into showing her his worluk. Then let her note carefully some object in the vision which hides some near-by spot from his view. Let her leap suddenly through the smoke, and hide in that spot. It is her one chance for escape and safety."

"I understand perfectly, and will see that she does," said the Negro soberly.

Then Mayhew told him of the sad death of Julo and Porto and the rest of the expedition.

"We did not realize that the Spider possessed other powers beyond his worluk," he concluded sadly.

The huge Negro brushed a tear from his eye, then fatalistically said, "The past is behind us. It is now our problem to shape the future. I go to get word to Eleria."

"But don't tell her of Porto's death," cautioned Mayhew.

Then he bathed and ate and slept.

THE next day the Spider sent for him. When he appeared before the throne and saluted, the Spider said, "Now as to your next task. I cannot come to terms with Tirio, the centurion. But there is another possible ally, who would be a thousand times more valuable, namely, Alvo, Grand High Priest of Ra. He covets my metaphysical knowledge, and especially the secret of my worluk. I need his airships. As matters now stand, I dare not leave these caves, for fear of capture. My physical infirmities put me at a great disadvantage; my distinctive appearance precludes disguise; and I cannot visit through my crystal globe, nor send my assassins through my ball of worluk smoke, to any spot which I have not visited in the flesh. So if Alvo will swap his secret of flying for my secret of worluk, I shall be able to visit many more places, and thus add them to my repertory. And I know, too, that Alvo has chafed at the supremacy of state over church. If he will ally himself with me, then together we can overthrow civil authority and make the church supreme."

"And have you proposed to the Grand High Priest this marriage of Ra and Pele?" asked Mayhew.

The Spider grinned and rubbed his skinny hands together with appreciation.

"An apt phrase," he chuckled. "The wedding of the fires of heaven to the fires of hell! No, I have not yet proposed it to Alvo. 'Tis hard to put it convincingly in writing. But you are a glib talker; so I shall send you as my ambassador."

Another chance at freedom!

"Willingly will I go," said Mayhew.

"But not in that costume or that beard," objected the Spider. "The black jersey would cause your arrest as a suspicious character, and the big yellow beard would identify you as Tolofo, the escaped convict. So go to your quarters. There I shall send shears, and a razor, and a striped toga."

Mayhew saluted and left. As soon as he was out of sight, his face fell. He had to shave; it was the Spider's orders. And if he shaved, the Spider would recognize

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him either as Adamo Mayho or as Porto, in either of which cases his masquerade as Tolofo would be at an end.

But suddenly an idea occurred to him. Accordingly, when the shaving things arrived, he did not wholly remove his beard, but instead shaped it into the square-cut Egyptian form so prevalent on the continent of Mu. If only this would get by with the Spider!

Then, clothed in a brilliant toga of red, white and blue—he smiled to himself at this unconscious mark of his true nationality — he once more presented himself in the throne room.

"How do I look?" he hopefully asked.

The Spider gasped.

"Excellent! I would never know you."

"Then I'm ready to start. How do I go?"

"By worluk, but not quite yet," the Spider ominously replied, "for here is another matter which must first be disposed of. I had almost forgotten it." He clasped his hands in command. "Bring in Koko and Meeno."

Mayhew blanched. Since his return, he had forgotten that this menace still overhung him.

Attendants brought in the yellow spearman and the white slave. Mayhew, wrapped in the dignity of his toga, took his accustomed position beside the throne.

"Now, Koko," said the Spider, with oily sweetness, "you may repeat your accusations against Tolofo."

The yellow man furtively eyed the figure beside the throne.

"This is indeed Adamo Mayhew, and not Tolofo," he said, but his voice lacked the ring of positive conviction.

"Prove it!" snapped the Spider.

"My proof is Meeno, the slave."

"Meeno," said the Spider. "Is this man who stands beside me Tolofo, or is he Mayho?"

The white slave gave one terrified look at the superb figure with its striped toga and square-cut beard; then prostrated himself before the throne.

"May your excellency forgive," he whined. "It is neither. I never saw this man before."

"Oh, yes you have, Meeno," thundered Adams Mayhew. "Think. Who was it who saved you from the rush of waters? Have you no gratitude?"

"It was you," whined the slave. "I recognize the voice."

"And who am I? Tolofo or Mayho?"

He was risking everything on the fellow's terrified state of mind at finding him a favorite of the Spider.

"You are Tolofo."

"Good! And what became of Adamo Mayho?"

"He was drowned."

"And did I ever agree to help you escape, or suggest that you do so?"

"No!" The whine became a wail.

"THERE, your excellency," said Mayhew, turning to the throne with a shrug. "You see."

With a shriek of rage Koko, the yellow spearman, hurled his spear squarely at the Spider. It struck him in the chest and crumpled him back into a corner of the huge square throne. But—wonder of wonders—it did not penetrate.

Recovering from the blow, the Spider seized the spear and cast it contemptuously to the floor. His eyes flashed balefully.

"To Pele with both of them," he snarled. Then turning to Mayhew, and in a lighter tone, he said, "You see, I am invulnerable. I have other powers besides worluk, and the skill to loose the fumes and fires of Pele upon my enemies."

"How do you do it?" asked Mayhew, partly with real admiration, and partly from a desire to secure useful information.

The Spider leaned forward and whispered confidentially, "It's really very simple. A weapon-proof vest beneath this black jersey."

Meanwhile the two conspirators were being dragged from the room, screaming, "Mercy! Mercy, your excellency!"

Mayhew held up his hand.

"Just a moment," he said. Then, turning to the Spider, "For the spearman, no mercy; he plotted against me and tried to kill your excellency. But the slave was merely a victim and tool. He meant no harm. Spare him."

"I hope your brains are not as soft as your heart," the spider said sadly.

"Both my brains and my heart are loyal to the cause which they have espoused," Mayhew replied.

"Well said," approved the Spider, missing the hidden meaning in the words. "Very well, the man may live."

"Long life to Tolofo, and to his excellency!" cried the slave, as they led him away.

"He puts you first," remarked the Spider wryly. "And yet, why not? It was you who spared him. And now I do not

feel in the mood for worluk. Send me a maiden, a plump one. And you, Tolofo, come back in an hour."

In his quarters, Mayhew found Moorfi, who reported that the message had gotten through to Eleria. Then Mayhew recounted the events of the throne room.

When he reached the point where the slave had been unable to identify him either as Mayho or Tolofo, the Negro grinned and interpolated, "It must have been two other fellows, like in the story of the two men who had never been to Myax."

"We have a story like that in my own country," said the American, "only in our story the city is St. Louis."

The mention of his own country made him sad. Would he ever see it again? Had it, too, been destroyed in the same earthquake which had caused the whaling barque Alaska to vanish, and had substituted this strange and unknown Mu-dominated world for the world to which Mayhew had been accustomed?

He was still wondering about the fate of America when the Spider sent for him again. The creature was in a very businesslike mood. The crystal sphere was at his side, the bowl of worluk smoking.

"You see that scene," he announced, as the smoke took shape at the waving of his hand. "This is the nearest I have ever been to the principal temple of the most high Ra. So it is there that I must start you off. Follow that path along the bank of the stream until you come to a town. It is the town of Forbosa. Inquire there for Alvo, the Grand High Priest of Ra. Give him my message and return to this spot with his answer. Mark well the spot. I will be awaiting you."

Mayhew saluted and stepped through the curtain of smoke. Then looked back.

But all signs of the Spider and his court were gone. Mayhew was standing on the green bank of a pleasant stream. He was out in the world. He was free once more. A feeling of exultation swept through his being as he stretched his arms in the warmth of the life-giving sun.

But his exalted mood was swiftly succeeded by a realization that somewhere miles away upon a skull-topped, red-marble throne, there squatted a repulsive creature, who was watching his every move, and who possessed the power to drag him back at will into the red darkness of the volcanic caves. He shuddered at the thought, and then strode resolutely forward to put as much distance as possible between himself and that loathsome form.

It was still morning, and the day was cool. There was a well defined path along the edge of the river, and walking proved to be easy. The stream was a sluggish one which wound its sinuous way, in fantastic curves and bends, through fertile meadows and around wooded hills. Tall fronded palms lined the river's banks, and at their feet were masses of great feathery ferns which spread their long arms out over the stream. Huge lacy winged dragonflies and brilliant, metallic-colored butterflies flitted about, close to the surface of the water.

AT times Mayhew passed along stretches of lowlands. Here the river broadened into shallow ponds, around whose shores red and yellow and orange and blue lotus flowers dotted the thick matting of lily-pads like varicolored jewels in a setting of green gold.

At other times the river would wind between hills smothered beneath masses of impenetrable tropic jungles.

It was all serenely peaceful, serenely beautiful, and yet for Mayhew it was ominously overshadowed by the dread presence of the Spider. He could almost feel the creature's hand on his shoulder, guiding him on. He glanced apprehensively behind him.

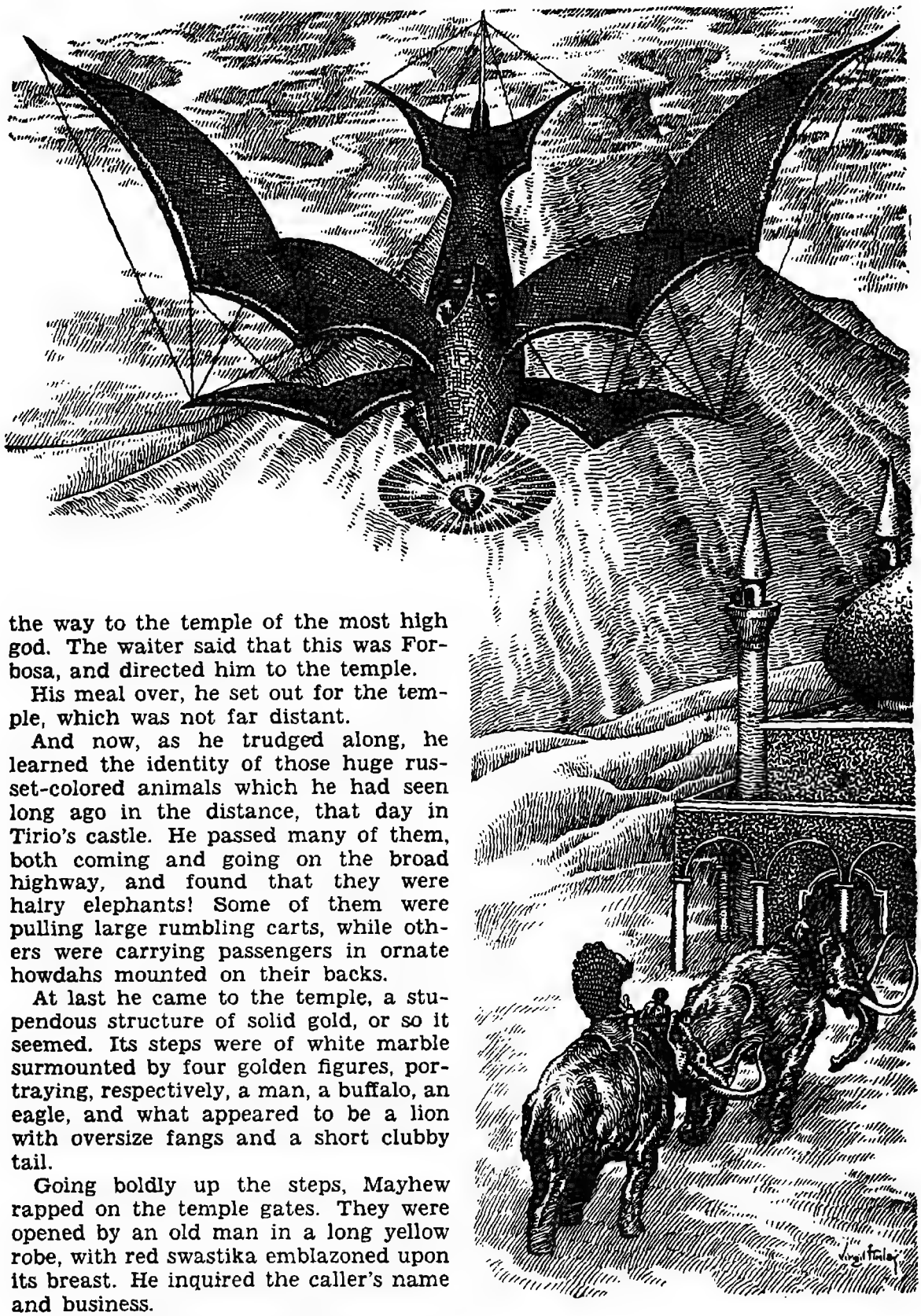
In the dim purple distance stood the volcano; and, as Mayhew looked, the pall of smoke at its summit seemed to take definite shape; a globular black body, with eight wavy projections extending from it. Mayhew shuddered.

Shaking off this gloomy mood, so incongruous in the midst of all the lovely surroundings, he strode on.

Toward noon he began to come upon cultivated field after cultivated field, and presently reached a small village. At first he hesitated about entering this settlement, lest some one mistake him for Tolofo, the escaped convict. And, if arrested, there was now no Julo to identify and save him. But then, he reflected, this was a risk which he had to take. So he strode boldly forward into town.

Attached to the toga, which he was wearing, he found a pouch of the same material; and in this pouch there were a few coins. So he hunted out a tavern and bought himself a meal.

After ordering, he asked the waiter if this were the village of Forbosa, and also



the way to the temple of the most high god. The waiter said that this was Forbosa, and directed him to the temple.

His meal over, he set out for the temple, which was not far distant.

And now, as he trudged along, he learned the identity of those huge russet-colored animals which he had seen long ago in the distance, that day in Tirio's castle. He passed many of them, both coming and going on the broad highway, and found that they were hairy elephants! Some of them were pulling large rumbling carts, while others were carrying passengers in ornate howdahs mounted on their backs.

At last he came to the temple, a stupendous structure of solid gold, or so it seemed. Its steps were of white marble surmounted by four golden figures, portraying, respectively, a man, a buffalo, an eagle, and what appeared to be a lion with oversize fangs and a short clubby tail.

Going boldly up the steps, Mayhew rapped on the temple gates. They were opened by an old man in a long yellow robe, with red swastika emblazoned upon its breast. He inquired the caller's name and business.

"Tell the Most Gracious Grand High Priest of the Flaming Ra," said Mayhew, "that my identity and my message are for his ears alone."

Such was the assurance and dignity of

There was a steady drone in the air as there appeared one of the strange mechanical dragon-flies which carried the priests of Ra

the caller's bearing that the temple attendant, instead of ordering him off the steps, actually ushered him into an anteroom, and then went off through resounding corridors to give the astoundingly audacious message to the Grand High Priest in person.

On his way hither, Mayhew had seriously considered proceeding to the Golden City, instead of to the temple, for he was now outside the influence of the psychic powers of the Spider. But three considerations had deterred him from this change of plans. In the first place, with Julo and Porto both dead, there would be no one to whom to turn. In the second place, it would be of utmost value to the government of Mu for him to learn and report whether an alliance was effected between the priesthood of Pele and the priesthood of Ra. And last, but not least, Eleria was still in the clutches of the Spider! So he had continued to act the emissary.

PRESENTLY the attendant returned and reported that Alvo would see him. Accordingly he was conducted to a small and simple room, where a very old but virile man, with smooth-shaven face and yellow gown and skull cap, sat in a high-backed wooden chair behind a wooden table. The table bore ink and parchment and stylus, and was strewn with parchment manuscripts.

Shrewd eyes appraised Mayhew as he entered and gave the customary Muian salute.

"Well?" said Alvo.

"Your worship," Mayhew replied, "may this man withdraw?"

"You do not mind being searched for weapons?"

"Certainly not."

"Search him, then."

The white-bearded attendant ran his hands over Mayhew's body, removed his broadsword, then left the room.

"Be seated."

Mayhew took the proffered chair.

"And now," said Alvo, "your errand."

So Mayhew sketched, rapidly and as enticingly as he could, the proposal of the Spider for an alliance between Pele and Ra. The venerable prelate nodded from time to time, to indicate that he got some point; but, apart from this gesture, his face remained expressionless, and gave no indication as to what thoughts were going on inside his skull.

When Mayhew concluded, Alvo asked him a few brief questions, and when they had been answered, said, "This matter requires serious thought. Be our guest here until to-morrow, and then you will receive our answer."

But Mayhew shook his head, for he feared that the Spider might grow impatient awaiting his return. And so he said, "I thank your worship, but there are certain matters in Forbosa which I must attend to this afternoon. I will return to-morrow for my answer."

Alvo rang a small gold bell which sat upon the table, and the white-bearded attendant returned, gave Mayhew his sword, and showed him out.

A long, hard tramp back through Forbosa and by the side of the river remained. It was late that afternoon when he neared the spot where he was supposed to stop beside a certain tree, well-noted by him, to be sucked through the worluk haze back to the throne room of his master. But he was several hundred yards from it, around a turn in the path, when suddenly a girlish form, in flying white gown and with disheveled golden hair, dashed around the corner toward him. It was Eleria!

CHAPTER XV

THE FLAMING GOD

ON catching sight of the strange, square-bearded young man approaching her down the river path, Eleria halted in full flight, hesitated for an instant, and then sped on again to meet him.

"Oh," she panted, "save me! I am pursued by spidermen!"

Then she looked at him inquiringly, as though half expecting that he would scoff at her fears, for many persons in Mu were inclined to doubt the existence of the spider menace.

He laughed. "You don't recognize me, then? I'm Adams Mayhew. But quick! I must help you to escape, without implicating myself, for there is much espionage I still have to do at the court of the Spider. May I carry you?"

Tired as he was, she was probably far more tired.

She hesitated for a moment, then blushed and nodded. So Mayhew swung her light body into his strong arms and ran back toward Forbosa with her, along the river path. He realized, however, that the assassins of the Spider were probably gaining on them.

Accordingly, when presently they reached a fork in the road, he lowered her gently to the ground and said, "Here, quick, into that clump of bushes. Any bits of your dress which may show through the leaves will be mistaken for its white flowers. I will go back and try to head the spearmen off. If I succeed, you lie here for about an hour and then push on to Forbosa. If I fail, I shall try to divide the party at this bush. Follow me, if I go down one trail alone. Good-by, and good luck."

And he strode off to meet the oncoming assassins. Only a few paces and they were upon him, three of them. If he had been a strange Muian gentleman, things would have gone hard with him; another body would have been found, floating in a stream, with the mark of the Spider pinned to its breast by a dagger. Fortunately one of the men had seen him in the throne-room in his new beard and attire, so this man hailed him as an ally, and inquired excitedly if he had seen Eleria.

"Why no!" exclaimed Mayhew, showing a perturbation which he really felt "What do you mean?"

"His excellency was waiting for your return, with her in his arms," explained the spearman, "when suddenly she stood up, jumped through the screen of worluk smoke, and fled. His excellency was so upset by this that the ball of smoke wavered and broke. He had to send for a new bowl of powder, and by the time he got it going again the girl was out of sight. But he had been watching her all the time in his crystal globe, and we had been summoned and were standing in readiness. As soon as the new smoke formed he sent us through. She went along this path, he said."

"Quick, then, let us catch her!" directed Mayhew. "It is quite a distance to town, and she will tire long before she reaches it."

"But how can it be you did not see her? That is, unless she left the path."

"I doubt if she left the path; she would have been too frightened and excited to do anything but flee. However, just a few steps from here there is a fork. She must have gone down the other branch from the one I was on. One of you," pointing to the one he knew, "go back to his excellency. Report to him that I gave his message to the person to whom it was directed, that I am spending the night in Forbosa, and that I have the appointment for tomorrow noon to receive my answer. Also report what we are doing about this search. The rest of us will go on to the fork, and there divide."

"Very well, sir," replied the spearman.

Saluting, he turned and went back along the path.

"Come on!" said Mayhew to the other two.

A few paces on they reached the parting of the ways.

Mayhew said, "I came down the right-hand path, so she must have gone down the left, or I would have met her. You two go down the left-hand path as fast as you can run. If she has gone that way, you can undoubtedly catch her. I will take the right-hand path on the chance that she may have eluded me on that route. If I catch her I will drag her back. If not I will put up for the night at the inn. Don't venture too near the town. Now—run!"

They ran. So did Mayhew, down the other path of the fork. But as soon as they were out of sight, he stopped and waited. Soon Eleria hurried up to him. Together they went on to the town, she running and being carried by turns.

They reached the town without mishap and without meeting any one. On the outskirts, Mayhew gave the girl some of his money, and they entered town separately, lest they be seen by spies of the Spider. Separately they put up at the inn. Eleria sent out for a garment more conventional than the filmy white gown in which she had fled. Both freshened themselves up, and then met surreptitiously in Eleria's room.

First she detailed how she had followed out the suggestions which he had sent her through Moorfi.

"The only snag," she said, "was the matter of clothes. Of course, if I had to, I could have worn that awful harem costume."

She blushed prettily, and Mayhew coughed embarrassedly at a recollection of those yellow girls crawling hypnotized into the arms of the Spider.

"But," she continued, "how could I run through the country in that deshabille? Imagine my entering Forbosa with nothing on!"

She laughed gayly, the humor of the situation overcoming her embarrassment.

"And so," she went on, "I persuaded that fatuous old fool of a hunchback to clothe me in a costume more fitting to the dignity of an empress, than to the

physical seductiveness of a harem. You know, the Spider has actually asked me to marry him."

Mayhew expressed horror.

"It's scarcely any better than to be one of his concubines," he asserted indignantly.

"Except that it's more complimentary," she pouted.

"I don't believe you really mean that," he said.

"Forgive me for being facetious," she replied, sobering. "You have risked your life to save mine, which is more than I deserve after treating you the way I did back there in the Golden City."

"I would gladly do anything for you," he blurted out; then to cover up his confusion, he went hurriedly on to say, "and the way you treated me was perfectly all right, you know, for you thought that I was some one else."

AT THIS mention of "some one else," he suddenly remembered that the disagreeable task lay ahead of him of breaking the news to her of the death of Porto. He coughed, and hesitated.

Noticing his perturbation, she asked, "What is the matter?"

"Oh, nothing. Nothing," he said hurriedly. "What do you plan to do next? You can't stay in Forbosa even overnight. There will be spies here, searching."

"Why, I suppose," she mused aloud, "that I shall send a message to Julo, and then start at once for the Golden City. There is probably a night-elephant running between here and there."

Mayhew looked sadly upon her, and strove to think of adequate words by which to convey the news of Julo's death.

Finally he merely blurted it out, and then recounted to her the sad story of the ill-fated expedition.

When he finished she burst into tears.

"You do not need to tell me the rest," she said. "For I know. I can feel it. If there was dangerous patriotic adventure to be had, my Porto would have been in it. And now he's dead, along with the rest. Oh, to think that I called him a coward! And even after I learned that he had not been a coward, I flirted with Tirio, just to annoy Porto. And now Porto's gone, gone without knowing that I love him. May Ra forgive me!"

She flung her arms around Adams Mayhew's neck, and sobbed upon his shoulder.

It was exquisite pleasure to have her slender arms about him, and her dear head nestling on his shoulder. And he was truly sympathetic with her grief. But the cause of it gave him many a twinge of jealousy.

At last she raised her head and stifled her sobs. Firmly setting her pointed chin, she tried to stiffen her still quivering lips.

"I must go now," she said. "Come and see me the next time you are in the Golden City." Then, with a sudden thought: "Come with me now. Why can't you come with me now?"

He was sadly torn between love and duty.

"There's nothing I would like better," he said. "But I owe it to Julo's memory —and to Porto's too—to carry on the fight which they started. There is much still to be learned of the Spider's plans and powers, and I mean to do it. Until he is disposed of, none of us is safe."

"Why not kill him and be done with it? Haven't you had the opportunity?"

"I've thought of that," said he soberly, "but, in the first place, he is invulnerable, or nearly so. And, in the second place, I am convinced that he has a group of

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other master minds in the background, ready to take over, if anything should occur to him. He is too clever to overlook the need for that."

Then Mayhew told the girl all that he knew of the Spider's powers and plans, culminating in his proposed alliance with the priests of Ra.

"After tomorrow's conference," he said, "I shall send a note to you. It will say merely 'yes' or 'no.' Thus will I inform you whether or not the alliance has been effected. Then will you please go to the authorities and tell them all you know. I shall return to the Spider to learn more. If I ever escape him, I shall come to see you."

To his surprise, she flung her arms once more around his neck, sobbing out, "Don't go! I don't want you to go. I've lost Julo, and Porto, and every one I know; and I don't want to lose you too. You're all I have left in the world, except an old uncle. I don't want you to die. Come back with me to the Golden City!"

Gently he disengaged her.

"Dearest," he said, "I must go. You would despise me if I quit the job now. Julo and Porto must be avenged. The faithful Moorfi, who helped to save you, is counting on my return. I must go back."

She dried her tears. He kissed her tenderly.

"Good-by, dear," he said. "Go downstairs now, and find out about the night-elephant."

He kissed her again, while she clung pitifully to him. Then he left the room and did not see her again before her departure.

That evening, in the main room of the inn, he kept his ears open for news of any untoward occurrences in the vicinity, but heard of none. He slept soundly in his room—how much better the fresh air of Forbosa than the sulphur-tainted fumes of the caves of Pele—and left the next morning, shortly before noon, for the temple of Ra.

His heart sang as he walked along, for his thoughts were of the lovely Eleria.

AT THE temple he was admitted without delay and was led at once to the plain small office of Alvo, the unpretentious supreme potentate of the prevailing religion of the entire Empire of the Sun.

As he entered, he inadvertently gave the Roman salute of Pele, instead of the triangular gesture of Ra, and the prelate frowned.

But quickly dissembling his displeasure, he said, "I suppose you have come for our answer to your master, the Spider."

"Yes," said Mayhew.

"Very well. You shall have it, all in due time." Not one muscle of that poker-face gave the least inkling what the answer was to be. "But first may I be permitted to do you the courtesy of showing you through our beautiful temple? You have never been here before?"

Mayhew shook his head.

"Oh, of course," agreed the prelate, and there was just the faintest tinge of scorn in his suave old voice. "A worshiper of Pele would not be apt to be familiar with the temples of Ra."

"I worship neither Pele nor Ra," said Mayhew without thinking; then bit his lip.

But apparently no harm was done, for the high priest replied, "Ah, an atheist then. But even so, you appear to be a cultivated gentleman, who can appreciate good architecture."

Impatient as Mayhew was to learn the result of his embassy, he could not but politely accept the honor.

So the priest rang for another old man of nearly his own age and appearance, and together they conducted their guest through the temple. From the study of the high priest they took him down a long corridor lined with the cells where dwelt the lesser priests and attendants. Several of these cells they showed him; all were Spartan in their simplicity and military in their neatness.

But the huge hall of worship was quite different. Never, since his arrival on the island of Mu, had Adams Mayhew seen so much gold. Every inch of the white marble walls was encrusted with ingeniously carved gold fretwork. Like the temple which he had visited in the Golden City, this room was built in the form of an amphitheater, surrounded with tiers of marble seats; and above the seats a canopy of fluted gold, supported by spiral gold pillars. Beyond the canopy, this room, like the other, had no roof, being completely open to the sky. It was one of the "transparent temples," for which Mu was noted. He complimented the two old priests on its stupendous beauty.

"You have seen nothing yet!" they said, flashing a glance at one another. "For now, as a special tribute of hospitality, we

shall show you the holy of holies, a sight which is vouchsafed to few, even of the priesthood."

Murmuring his unworthiness of this great honor, and really anxious to receive his answer and be on his way, Mayhew followed them through a small door beneath one of the sections of seats, and down a long dark corridor, at the end of which one of the priests fumbled with a key in a lock..

At last a door swung open, admitting them to a small dim room. At first, all that Mayhew could make out was a single narrow shaft of bright sunlight, slanting down to the floor from a small round hole in the ceiling. All else was dark and indistinct by contrast.

Then, as his eyes became used to the peculiar combination of brilliance and gloom, he noticed in the exact center of the chamber a gray stone about five feet long, four feet high, and two feet thick, with a slightly rounded top. This stone looked as though it once had been white, but now it was streaked and stained and aged to a mottled gray—gray mottled with brown. On the side nearest him there hung a ring and two straps of gold.

"The altar of the Most High Ra," said Alvo. "Step nearer, favored one, and see a sight which few see."

Fascinated, Mayhew stepped forward. He arrived at the stone and leaned over to inspect it. Suddenly, with a precision which evidenced long practice, the two old men leaped upon him, seized his shoulders, swung him around, and bent him backward across the stone. In an instant, rings far down each side of the stone were snapped about his wrists, and one golden strap was bound across his neck, the other across his hips.

His two captors stepped back and gloated over him. Then one of them reached into a niche in the wall and brought forth a long slim knife.

"Thus die those who dare oppose the religion of the one true god," he hissed.

CHAPTER XVI

HUMAN SACRIFICE

MAYHEW strained and wrenched at his bonds, but they would not give an inch. He desisted.

"I have not opposed your god," he replied.

"You came to us as the emissary of Pele, did you not?"

"Yes, but—"

"Then for that you must die."

In desperation, Adams Mayhew decided to tell the truth as to his identity. Surely these priests, who had thus repulsed the offers of the Spider, could be trusted to keep his secret.

"I am a spy, a government spy," he blurted out. "Captured by the Spider, I changed places with one of his henchmen who died. I have won his confidence. I pass freely in and out of his domain, and have given much valuable information to the authorities. I came here yesterday and today—sent by the Spider, it is true—but for the real purpose of sounding you out."

"An insult!" shouted the lesser priest. "An insult which shall be effaced by your death!"

But Alvo stopped him with, "Peace! Desist! We should be calmly and serenely above all insult, in reliance on the knowledge that the great Ra, who sees all and knows all, has faith in us. But," turning to the victim on the altar, "it does interest us to learn if the government shares your suspicions of us."

"Certainly not," Mayhew hastened to aver. "It was entirely my own idea."

Alvo appeared much relieved.

"The government will not thank you for having meddled in our affairs," he said dryly. "What is your name, infidel?"

Mayhew had not even introduced himself as Tolofo, for fear of being turned over to the authorities as an escaped convict. Now, for a moment he hesitated. He had three names to choose from. The name "Tolofo" might still get him into trouble, and thus prevent him from returning to spy upon the Spider, and rescue the faithful Moorfi. The name "Adamo Mayho" would doubtless mean nothing to them. Hence he selected the third available name.

"I am Porto," he said, "of the Golden City."

Both men looked at him carefully.

"He does resemble Porto," admitted the lesser priest. "I have had the man pointed out to me. But Porto wore no beard."

"I have only recently grown it."

To the other priest Alvo said, "There is yet time to check up on this."

So the other left on a waddling run. During his absence, Mayhew pleaded with Alvo, but the latter turned a deaf ear to his pleas.

At last the lesser prelate returned with

an ominous gleam in his eye, and reported, "I heliographed to our temple in the Golden City, and they state that Porto is there."

"But that is impossible!" Mayhew blurted out, taken completely off his guard by the astounding news. "Porto can't be there. He died in the attack on the stronghold of the Spider."

"So!" hissed Alvo. "Then you are an impostor, by your own admission. Thus die the enemies of Ra!"

"But I tell you, I *am* a government spy," pleaded Mayhew frantically. "If you kill me, you're hurting the cause of Ra; not helping it. I'm Adamo Mayho, as they call me in the Golden City.

"I'm the double of Porto, and I took his name, thinking that he was dead, and that you would be more likely to know of him than of me."

"Somehow his words have the ring of truth in them," mused the high priest. "But he is an atheist."

"I'm not an atheist," objected Mayhew. "I worship Ra, but by another name."

"Everything about you seems to masquerade under other names," snapped Alvo dryly. "But enough of this nonsense. The time for the execution has arrived."

SEEING that there was no further hope, Mayhew stopped his pleas and clenched his jaw; resolving that if he must die, he would at least die like a man, instead of a cringing coward.

"Go ahead and strike!" he challenged them.

"Not yet," replied the lesser priest, grinning ghoulishly, or so Mayhew imagined. "We do not strike until the eye of Ra falls upon your left breast. Then we snatch out your living heart, and offer it, still beating, unto our god."

The "eye of Ra" was quite evidently the shaft of brilliant sunlight, shining down through the small orifice in the ceiling of this dungeon, and by now almost touching the right side of the victim. Mayhew twisted his head as far to the right as the golden strap across his neck would permit, and observed the shaft of light.

Its approach was uncannily steady. On and on came the golden ray of death; while Alvo, the Grand High Priest of Ra, stood expectantly at the head of the altar, the sharp sacrificial knife hanging poised in his upraised hand; and the other old priest, standing at the foot of the altar, began to intone "the death chant of the flaming god."

"O, Ra," he sang, "shine thy approval on this offering which we bring to thee. Touch his heart with thy shaft of gold, so that we may know that thou hast chosen him for the sacrifice."

The chant droned on and on. The sunbeam approached the altar and bathed the side of the stone and the right arm of Adams Mayhew. He could feel its warmth on his elbow. Then it passed over the edge of the altar and shone upon the right side of his chest.

Fascinated, he followed it with his eyes, then shifted his gaze to the sharp knife which hung poised above his diaphragm. He no longer needed to watch the ray of light, for he could feel the progress of its warmth across his body. So he watched the knife, knowing that when the ray passed to a position above his heart, his chest would be ripped open with one swift stroke, and his still beating heart would be plucked out. What happened after that would no longer concern him.

As the ray of death traversed his breast-bone, he tensed his muscles and steeled his nerves to meet the end. The chant ceased. There came an ominous pause. Then the knife began its descent.

Mayhew gasped, and shut his eyes to blot out the sight. A sudden feeling of coolness swept across his chest. Was this the way the fatal knife-thrust felt? And could it be that he still lived to feel it?

He waited for the outplucking of his heart, but it did not come. He heard an exclamation of disgust from one of the priests. Then he reopened his eyes. The room was in darkness. There was no shaft of light. And through the opening in the ceiling, the sky showed gray, not blue. A cloud was passing across the face of Ra, the sun.

CHAPTER XVII

THE KNIFE

AT LENGTH the sky, as seen through the tiny aperture in the roof of the crypt, turned from gray to blue again. The shaft of sunlight beat down once more through the opening. The high priest leaned forward again with his sacrificial dagger eagerly poised above the breast of Adams Mayhew.

But it was too late. The time for the sacrifice had passed, for the shaft of

light had gone beyond the breast of the intended victim, and would not shine upon the blood-stained altar again until high noon of another day.

"Ra blast him to Pele!" snarled the lesser of the two priests.

"Silence!" exclaimed Alvo reprovingly. "Such language in the holy temple is most unseemly!"

"Why not kill him even now?" urged the other. "No man will ever know but what we struck while the light was upon him."

"No man would know," mildly replied the high priest. "But Ra would know, and it would be on our consciences forever. Ra himself has refused to accept our sacrifice, so we must await another day."

"Shall we leave him here, or shall we remove him; and if so, just how?"

"That does present a difficulty," mused Alvo. "We are two old and feeble men. If we release him, he might destroy us. But on the other hand we cannot permit any lesser priests and temple attendants to enter this holy of holies, for the purpose of guarding us. And if we leave him here for twenty-four hours, he may perish of the strain, or at least become so weakened that his heart will not be beating strongly as we pluck it out on the morrow. We are indeed in a quandary."

This conversation was being carried on in utter disregard of the presence of Adams Mayhew, as though he were a mere bit of furniture or a lower animal. He decided that it was time for him to take a part in the conversation.

So he interposed, "As proof of my innocence and good faith, O Alvo, I will give you my word of honor that, if you release me, I will attempt no violence, nor will I try to escape until you have gotten me out of here and have placed me in the hands of competent guards."

"The word of a heretic is meaningless, Alvo," warned the lesser priest.

But Alvo replied, "Even so, I am inclined to believe him, at least this much. Do you therefore unshackle him, while I go to summon husky guards to await just outside the entrance to the tunnel which leads from the amphitheater to this spot."

He placed the sacrificial knife back in its niche and departed. The door clanged shut behind him. The other priest leaned over the altar and gloated at Adams Mayhew. Then he walked to the niche, picked up the sacrificial knife, and returned to the altar.

His eyes gleamed exultantly and evilly as he hissed, "And now, heretic, we are alone together. No one but you and I can know what shall now occur within this crypt. I shall slice your wrists in such a way as to make it appear that you chafed them raw against your manacles. Then I shall run and tell Alvo that you became so violent that I dared not loosen you. No one but you and I will know the truth, and you shall be dead, wandering, a lost soul, through the realms of Pele."

Seeking to appeal to the man's superstition, Mayhew exclaimed, "But Ra will know. Ra sees everything."

The priest shook his head and grinned toothlessly.

"Even Ra will not know," he asserted, "for Ra hides his head today."

It was true; the sky again showed leaden gray through the hole in the top of the crypt.

Still gloating, the priest cautiously took hold of one of Mayhew's wrists and studied it to find a place where his slashings would most plausibly resemble the chafing of the manacles. Mayhew strained to snatch it free, but its fetters held it motionless. Carefully the priest began to saw.

But at that instant Mayhew suddenly remembered that his legs were free. His neck was strapped to the top of the altar and his wrists to its sides, but his feet and legs were free. The priest was preoccupied with his delicate task.

So Mayhew reared his legs into the air and flung his knees around the neck of the old man. Then he squeezed with all the force of his strong young thighs. The attack was so unexpected that the priest dropped the knife, which would have been a most efficient means of defense against even these tactics. He tried to scream, but his wind was completely cut off by the strong legs of his intended victim.

Mayhew squeezed and squeezed, until the body of the priest slumped and went limp. Yet still he continued to squeeze, until he himself was exhausted. Then he lay back on the altar and let the body slide to the floor.

His enemy was dead. But, in the reaction which followed his fatiguing efforts, he felt nothing but supreme despair, for he had killed a priest of Ra within the holy of holies, and thereby had undoubtedly sealed his own doom irrevocably. Limp and tired, he awaited his fate.

Alvo returned, flung open the door, gasped at the sight of his dead subordinate, and then transfixed the man on the altar with a penetrating glance of horror and reproach.

"You broke your word of honor, pledged by the holy name of Ra," he said. "And for that you shall most assuredly die."

"Alvo," asserted Mayhew in a level tone, "I killed in self defense. This priest of yours—you will remember how eager he was to profane the altar of the flaming god by killing me at other than the appointed hour. When you left, he tried to do it. See, the holy dagger is no longer in its niche, but lies on the floor there, where he dropped it, when I defended myself against his cowardly attack. He—"

"Enough," snapped Alvo, his eyes blazing. "Doubtless he carried the dagger merely as a defense against the violence which he expected—quite rightly, as it now turns out—from a false-swearing heretic such as you."

"But I did not break my oath," pleaded Mayhew. "I swore to be peaceful if and when released; and he refused to release me."

"A mere quibble," sneered Alvo contemptuously, "for he was about to release you. But I will hear no more. Lie there and await your fate."

Then, picking up the body, he staggered with it from the crypt. Mayhew could hear him shout, as he passed down the corridor, "Come hither, guards, and help me bear this body to the amphitheater, where we shall pray to Ra to restore life to this, his faithful servant."

Mayhew sniffed grimly. Circumstantial evidence, all against him. And yet he could hardly blame the high priest.

ABOUT an hour later Alvo returned, with a very sad and enigmatical expression on his finely chiseled old face.

"Ra has refused to revive your victim," he said. "The flaming god still averts his face. Perhaps there may be some truth to your account of what happened here in my absence. But I can afford to take no further chances with you. Here you must lie until noon tomorrow. Then, at high noon, let Ra judge between you and me."

He departed. For a time, Mayhew slept. That wasn't so bad. But finally he could sleep no more. He was able to exercise the lower part of his body, but the cramped position of his arms and neck became excruciating.

Morning came, and his senses cleared, though his neck and arms were numb, and his throat was parched and dry. Pink fleecy sky showed through the hole in the ceiling, but this speedily changed to gray. Darker and darker gray.

At this sight, Mayhew took heart. Perhaps Ra would again avert his face, and spare the victim for another twenty-four hours. But could he stand this ordeal for that additional length of time? In the end, there must eventually come a clear and unclouded noon. And then the knife!

He shuddered. Then, with determination, he began to flex and unflex his almost nerveless fingers. He lifted and twisted each shoulder. He swung his head slowly from side to side. He brought into play every one of his cramped muscles, and gradually the blood flooded back into them, and he was thoroughly alive again, alive from head to toe.

But, as the morning dragged wearily on, his hope began to fade. The sky, as seen through the small opening above him, changed to lighter gray, then white. Occasional rifts of blue appeared. And then the shaft of sunlight entered, and made a spot of light on one of the walls. That spot began to descend. It reached the floor, and crept ominously toward the altar. Footsteps sounded in the corridor outside, and Alvo entered with another priest, a young one this time.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE DEAD RETURN

"THIS young fellow owes his promotion to you," the high priest announced with a grim smile. "For the exigencies of the occasion have demanded that I pass him over the heads of many of his seniors, in order that the vicar of Ra on earth may be protected against any repetion of your violence."

"Alvo," Mayhew levelly replied, "it astounds me that such an evidently intelligent person as you should not be blessed by Ra with the knowledge that, in attempting to strike at the Spider through putting to death a supposed emissary of his, you are in reality playing into his hands by doing away with the one man in all Mu who is in a position to thwart him."

"Enough of these blasphemies!" shouted the high priest with flashing eyes. "Do not let the name of Ra cross your impious lips again. The service proceeds."

He snatched the knife from its niche, and took up his position by the side of the altar. The young priest stood at the altar's foot and began the death-chant of Ra. It was evidently quite new to him, and he sang it haltingly. But what did that matter! The sky was clear above, the "eye of Ra" approached with relentless precision, and the sacrificial blade was in steady and experienced hands.

A shout was heard in the corridor outside. "Alvo, a message! A message of most vital import!"

With a shrug of annoyance the high priest studied for a moment the position of the beam of light.

"There is yet time," he announced. "Suspend the chant. I go, but I shall return."

Then, laying the knife upon the floor, he sped from the room. Mayhew's tensed body relaxed and he sighed heavily. Then he had an idea.

"Say, old fellow," he addressed the young priest. "You owe your job to me. If you are grateful—no, I won't put it on that ground. If you are alive to the responsibilities of your new position as assistant vicar of Ra, can't you persuade Alvo to hold up this execution until he investigates the truth of what I've been saying? It would be a terrible tragedy to help the Spider by killing the one loyal Muian who has access to the secrets of that fiend of Pele."

"It might be done," the young priest thoughtfully replied. "Certainly if you are telling the truth, your death would be on our consciences forever. And yet—let Ra decide! He knows all things. If you are innocent, he will withhold his eye."

"Look here," said Mayhew. "Send for Marta, the widow of the magistrate Julo. She can identify me. She knows how I helped her husband in his plans against the Spider."

"Yes, I've heard about that. You led him and many other brave men into an ambush, from which the survivors have just returned. Doubtless Marta will thank you for *that!* We learned all about it by heliograph early yesterday afternoon. Your identity was quite well established, before Ra finally hid his face for good."

Mayhew groaned. Every fact on which he had depended for exoneration seemed to be turned against him. The priests

You're in the groove for shaving joy
When you try Thin Gillettes . . . oh boy!
You skim tough beards off in a flash—
Use fewer blades—look slick—save cash!
4 for 10c
8 for 19c
12 for 27c
Gillette
BLADES
Easy Way To Get Even More Shaves With Every Gillette Blade

now knew that he had been telling the truth as to who he was, and yet they still believed that he deserved to die.

At this instant Alvo bustled in again. The young priest resumed the chant of death.

But Alvo interrupted with, "No. No! There is to be no sacrifice. Release the prisoner."

Mayhew slumped, and his senses reeled with relief.

As the two priests fumbled with his bonds, he shook himself again and weakly inquired, "What has happened?"

"Ra be praised that the message came through in time," said Alvo devoutly. "But then it was Ra's own self that delivered the message. Ever since Ra hid his face yesterday afternoon, the temple in the Golden City has been trying to get word to us that you are indeed a loyal friend of the government, and an enemy of the Spider."

Tenderly they helped him from the altar and led him out of the room of death. As they all passed out of the tunnel into the amphitheater a surprising sight met Mayhew's eyes; Porto, standing with outstretched hands of greeting.

"But," Mayhew exclaimed, "the Spider said that every man of the expedition perished."

"He may have thought so," replied Porto. "What happened was that we advanced in two bodies. Only the smaller body, which served as an advance guard, was trapped. The rest of us fled back to the ships, and returned to the Golden City for reenforcements. From now on we fight in the open. All Mu is being aroused to the necessity of destroying the Spider."

"And Eleria—"

"Arrived safely at home yesterday morning. She is being carefully guarded."

"I'll wager that you had considerable to do with saving my life just now."

"I did, but it was a close shave. The temple in the city sent out inquiries as to whether I was there or here. Word of this inquiry reached me a few hours later. At once I sensed that you must be the cause. By the time I learned that you were to be executed as an impostor it was evening, and so we could not send a heliograph message. Leaving word that the message must be gotten through with the first clear sky, I set out for here. I traveled all night. My elephant proved balky and delayed me. I was desperate. I arrived here just now, to find that the message had gotten through, and that you were saved."

AT THIS point the high priest interrupted to say sententiously: "Glory be to Ra, who delivered the message, before he smiled upon the sacrifice."

"Didn't I say that it could be safely left to Ra?" added the young priest.

Mayhew and Porto were served a meal in the personal apartment of the high priest. The latter withdrew in response to a summons from an attendant.

"I could be very happy," Mayhew asserted, "if Moorfi were free, and if Julo hadn't been killed."

"What's this?" said a genial voice from the doorway. "Lamenting my death, Adamo Mayho?"

And Julo himself stepped into the room, accompanied by the high priest.

"I thought I told you!" exclaimed Porto. "Julo was with the party that did not fall into the web of the Spider."

It was a glad reunion. After the greetings were over Mayhew related in detail all that had occurred since their last meeting, and all that he had learned about the Spider.

"Come back with us to the city," begged Julo. "You have risked enough for the cause. Eleria and we are now safe. Fight in our army if you wish, but do not again thrust yourself between the Spider's jaws."

"I must," said Mayhew soberly. "Moorfi is still in the caves of Pele, and I cannot desert him. Furthermore, it is important that we learn how the attempted alliance with Tirio and his confederates is working out. And also what other secrets the Spider must have up his sleeve."

"I guess you are right," assented Julo thoughtfully, "but I hate to have you go. You are almost a son to me. And I owe you my life at least once. Yes, you had better go. And there is one thing which I wish you to particularly try to learn. What is the purpose of those extensive excavations, on which the Spider is so assiduously working? I cannot even guess, and yet I feel certain that they constitute the worst menace that has ever confronted this continent; far more of a menace than merely the Spider himself."

So that afternoon Mayhew went back through Forbosa to a certain tree by the bank of the lotus-strewn stream, and waited.

He waited for some time, for evidently the Spider was not expecting him. But at last he saw the red haze which he had learned to know so well, and passed through the screen of worluk into the cave of the Spider. Once more he stood before his master.

The Spider's narrowed and penetrating eyes were upon him, seeming to read his very thoughts.

"Where have you been all this time? And why did you delay in returning?" hissed the creature.

"Perhaps your excellency would first care to know the results of my mission," Mayhew coolly replied.

"Tolofo," said the Spider with one of his characteristic rapid shifts of mood, "one thing that I like about you is the way that you stand up to me, instead of cringing before me like all these cattle. Yes, you may tell me about your mission, although I can see from the expression on your face that it was not successful."

"No, your excellency," Mayhew replied, in as regretful a tone as he could muster. "Not only was it unsuccessful for you, but it was almost fatal to me. In revenge for what they considered was an insult to their god, the priests strapped me to their sacrificial altar for twenty-four hours. But twice Ra declined the sacrifice by hiding his face at exactly the appointed hour, and so the superstitious fools let me go. But it was a narrow escape."

"I wonder," mused the Spider softly, but with an intent though covert glance at Mayhew, "if Ra himself really intervened to save you."

"Who knows?" the young man replied with a shrug. "Perhaps Pele sent a wisp of smoke to hide her rival's face."

The answer seemed to satisfy the Spider.

MAYHEW, seeking information, continued, "But, although the priesthood refused to ally themselves with you, how about Tirio? His secret anti-government organization has more men and more influential men than the priesthood. Has he yet assented to an alliance?"

"He has," the hunchback scientist replied. "The escape of Eleria was really fortunate, for it removed the only obstacle to my reaching an agreement with Tirio. And—although he doesn't know this—I intend to have Eleria for myself as soon as I rule the world. Tirio's price for the alliance is that he is to be the chief magistrate of the Golden City. He thinks thereby to secure both power and the girl. But I can plan at least one lap ahead of him."

"I am sure your excellency can," breathed the American.

"And now," the Spider continued, "I shall send for Tirio. Somehow he seems to feel that you harbor a hatred for him, because of his complicity in your original imprisonment."

"Not at all," said Mayhew. "Far be it from me to let that stand between me and a loyal ally of your excellency."

So Tirio was sent for. On his entry he looked at Mayhew most carefully. This was the first time that he had seen the supposed Tolofo in a toga, rather than a black jersey and tights; or since his bushy blond beard had been reduced to small square-cut Egyptian form. A gradual dawning of recognition spread over Tirio's features.

"Your excellency," he cried. "this is not Tolofo. It is either Porto or Adamo Mayho. I know not which, for they are as alike as twins."

"Tirio," the American replied undisturbed, "is this your attempted revenge on Tolofo for having captured you and brought you here? A very weak attempt, I should say. And besides, you ought to be grateful, rather than resentful, that I was the means of this meeting. Few men, other than members of your order, have had the honor of seeing the face of his excellency, and continuing to live."

"Yes, Tirio," added the Spider, but he was intently studying Mayhew as he spoke. "And men have been thrown to Pele quite recently for doubting the identity of this loyal supporter of mine."

Tirio saw that he was in a corner; and, with the bravery of a cornered rat, he blurted out, "Who killed Tolofo, and took his place as overseer? Who leaped through the screen of worluk, to save the life of your enemy Julo, whom your assassins were about to kill? Who gave away your secrets, and led the expedition to attack you? Who got word to Eleria how to escape? Who harbored her when she had fled you? Who persuaded the high priest of Ra to spurn your most fair offer of alliance? And who has now boldly come back to plot against us? Oh, you have been blind, your excellency!"

It was a perfect indictment. Mayhew blanched, in spite of his self control.

And the Spider, seeing this, cried, "You are right, Tirio. I *have* been blind. Ho,

guards! Seize the false Tolofo! Pele shall be fed today."

CHAPTER XIX

A HUNCHBACKED SAMSON

AS THE spearmen sprang to seize him, Mayhew drew his sword and leaped at the Spider. It was a most unwise move, for it destroyed his last chance of convincing the Spider that he was Tolofo. And it enabled the rat-faced Tirio to solidify himself with the monarch of the underworld, by stepping nimbly forward and with his own sword parrying Mayhew's blow.

The Spider was quivering with rage and his taloned fingers were gripping the arms of the throne.

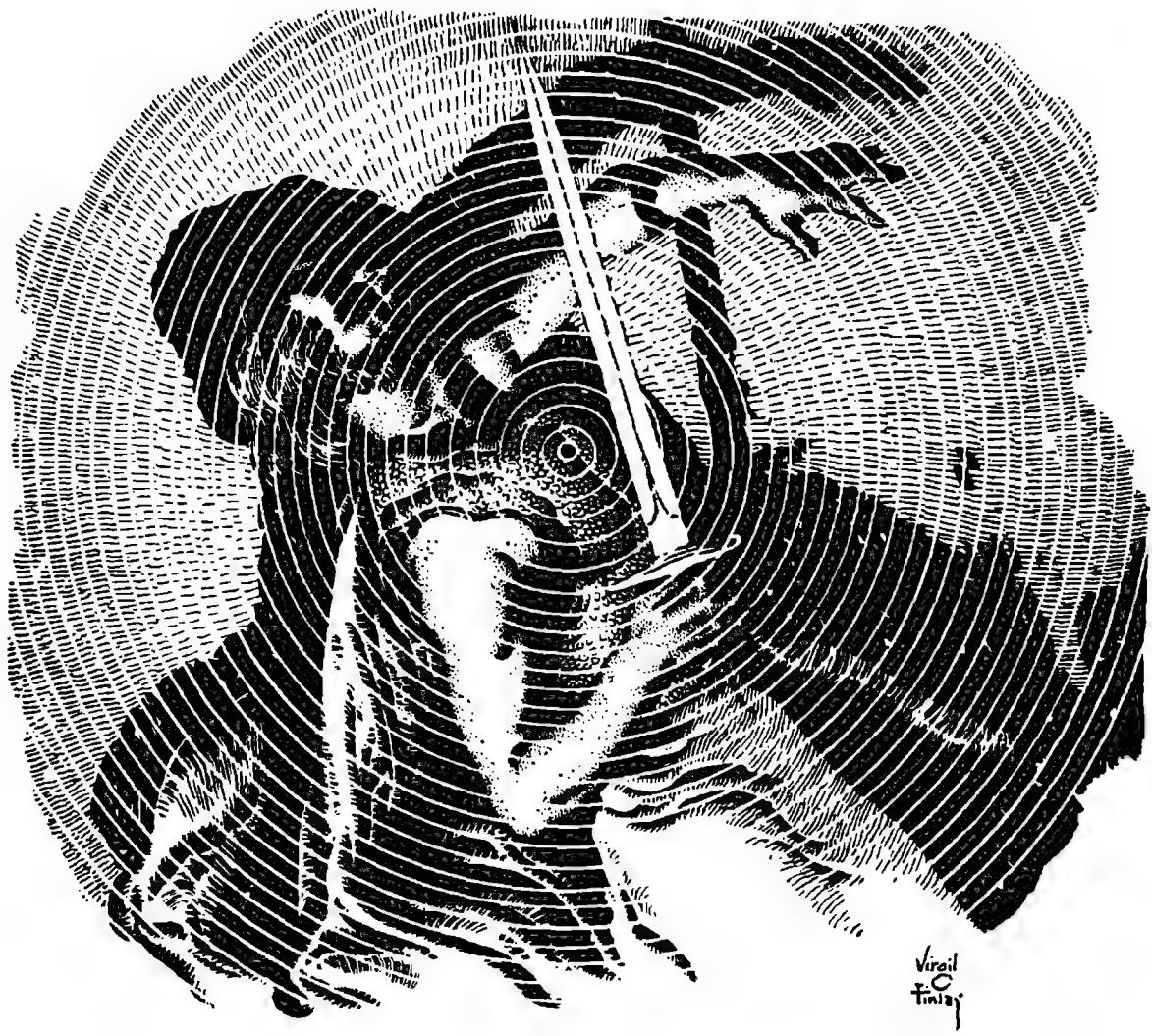
"Let there be no delay," he shrieked. "Take him to the eternal fires at once. And bring my chair-car, so that I may accompany him, and witness, with my own eyes, his destruction."

"May I make a suggestion, your excellency?" inquired Tirio in a gloating voice. "The Negro attendant of this Mayho, or Porto, or Tolofo, or whoever he is, was formerly of the house of Julo, your enemy.

"Doubtless therefore the Negro is also implicated in the conspiracy against you. May I suggest that he too goes to feed the eternal fires?"

The Spider rubbed his hands with evil glee as he exclaimed:

"In truth, Pele shall feast well today. Yes, Tirio, by all means send for the Negro, Moorfi."



With his sword drawn to defy the *Spider*, Mayhew felt a surge of disembodied force which seemed to strike against him and he staggered backward

Mayhew was hustled along, through caves and subterranean passages, to the vaulted cavern which held the surging pit of molten lava. Moorfi, bound hand and foot, joined them on the way. The huge Negro refused to walk, even to the accompaniment of prodding spear-points, so the spidermen were forced to carry him.

As he joined the group he sung out jovially to Mayhew, "Master, you haven't the right idea at all. They're making *you* walk, and here *I* am, riding. It reminds me of the story of the two black men who were stealing chickens. Did you ever hear it?"

But Mayhew was in no mood for ribald stories.

"Keep your eyes open, Moorfi," said he tensely. "We may yet get a chance to fight."

The Spider followed them in a chair, slung on two poles; and by his side walked the odious Tirio.

At the cave of Pele, the Spider directed the attention of his new ally to the surging lava.

"These are the eternal fires," he said. "And since the grand high priest spurns my offer of a marriage between Ra and Pele, I am contemplating another marriage."

Mayhew thought that the creature was referring to a marriage between his stunted self and the beautiful Eleria; but not so, for the Spider continued. "This other marriage, which I have planned for the fire-goddess, is with the god of Ocean. That is why I have dug a canal from the sea to here. My canal is nearly completed. At any moment now I can, at will, flood the sea-water into this very pit."

Mayhew pricked up his ears and listened intently.

"But would that not be dangerous?" asked Tirio in a voice which shook with concern.

"Quite so," the Spider suavely replied, "for it would destroy the entire world."

"But—your excellency," Tirio stammered.

"Oh, I shan't do it," the Spider continued. Tirio brightened perceptibly. "Except as a last resort."

Tirio's face fell again, as he asked, "And what do you mean 'as a last resort'?"

"If I cannot rule the world, I intend that there shall remain no world for any one else to rule. This should prove an added cement to our alliance, for now you realize that unless your and my combined forces succeed in conquering Mu, then you and I will die along with all the rest. But enough of all this talk, for I am sick of talk, and demand action. Let the execution proceed!"

Mayhew edged closer to his faithful Negro, and whispered in his ear, "Did you catch all that about letting the sea into the volcano? Well, remember it in all its details. One of us has just got to get out of here, and take word of this to Julo."

"I wouldn't mind doing that at all," Moorfi replied with a rather sickly grin on his round black face, "but it doesn't look very likely at just this moment. It reminds me of the story—"

But one of the yellow spearmen slapped him across the mouth, and he desisted.

Then, at a command from the Spider, the bonds of both the captives were untied, a ring of spear-points encompassed them, and they were simultaneously pushed very slowly toward the edge of the seething inferno. They could hear the chuckles of the mad monarch as he rubbed his skinny hands together, and gloated over their fate.

Mayhew glanced back and Tirio sang out to him, "A fitting end to that fight at the wharves."

"So that still rankles, does it?" Mayhew shot back at him.

At that moment the spearmen who were prodding him suddenly turned and ran, several of them dropping their spears in their flight. All the attendants were fleeing from the cavern. There remained but two of those who were prodding Moorfi, and even these were showing hesitancy. Tirio was standing aghast staring down at the Spider, who lay on his back on the cavern floor, flopping like a fish.

Quick as a flash Mayhew picked up one of the dropped spears and with it swept aside the two that were menacing his black friend.

"Seize a spear, Moorfi," he shouted, "and come on."

With that, he charged upon the prostrate spider. Now was the chance to rid the world of that menace.

BUT Tirio leaped between them and warded off the spear-thrust with his sword, at the same time calling upon the two remaining spearmen to rally to the defense of their master.

Seeing that there were three persons who did not fear the epileptic seizure,

they obeyed, and Mayhew was beaten back. Moorfi joined him, but they were no match for two experienced spears and one sword. And, in response to Tirio's shouts, others of the yellow spearmen began to drift timidly back.

Seeing that he and his black friend would soon be out-numbered and overpowered, Mayhew drew back his spear-arm and cast his spear at the convulsively twitching body of the hunchback. In spite of his inexperience with such weapons, it sped true, and struck a point against the breast of the little black form. But that was all. It bounced back without penetrating, and clattered to the ground.

Snatching up another spear, and realizing the futility of further attack upon the invulnerable Spider, Mayhew called to Moorfi, and they fled together into the surrounding shadows.

Several spearmen started to pursue them, but Tirio called them back to guard their fallen master, warning them that the two fugitives might circle and return to the attack from some unexpected quarter. Thus spoke the cautious coward that was Tirio.

But such a plan was farthest from Mayhew's intentions. Having failed to slay the Spider, his chief concern now was to get out of these caves and bring word to the Muians of the Spider's plan to flood the fires.

Mayhew was well acquainted with the way out of the caves, ending in the spiral shaft which led to the surface. In fact, that was the only route, other than the globe of worluk smoke, by which he had ever left the caves. For the first several hundred yards it ran straight, and then made a sharp bend to the right, thereafter following a rather sinuous course.

So Mayhew and Moorfi raced together down this first section. The turn ahead was dimly illumined, and when they rounded it on the run they could see a flickering light reflected on the wall ahead. Evidently some one with a torch was preceding them down the tunnel.

From time to time, as he and Moorfi proceeded cautiously on, Mayhew would glance back over his shoulder. At first there were no signs of pursuit; but, by the time the fugitives had traversed about half the distance from the caves of the fires of Pele to the shaft which led upward to the outer air, there were flickering reflections of lights to be seen behind, as well as ahead.

There was but one thing to do. As between being caught by the pursuing party, and catching up with the party ahead, the latter was preferable by far.

"Better the devil we don't know than the devil we know," said Mayhew. "Come on, Moorfi."

So they rapidly quickened their pace, until on rounding a turn in the tunnel they saw ahead of them two spider-men carrying torches. Lithely and silently Mayhew and Moorfi rushed these two men. The unexpected attack succeeded. Both spider-men were seized before either of them had time to drop his torch and draw his sword.

"Silence!" cautioned the American. "Not a word out of either of you, or we'll run you through. Now hurry to the exit."

The four of them reached the open air on the starlit mountainside just as the lights of the pursuing force of spider-men appeared at the foot of the shaft.

Mayhew seized the torches of his two captives and flung them into the depths. Then he and Moorfi took off the sword-belts of the two men and buckled them onto themselves.

"Back into the shaft," he commanded, "and, as you value your lives, don't tell any one that we went west."

"West?" asked his black friend incredulously, for the Golden City lay east.

"Yes, west, of course," Mayhew replied, giving him a nudge. "Come on." And he started westward across the rocks.

Silhouetted against the starlit sky, he could see the heads of the two yellow men peering at him over the top edge of the shaft, and he knew that they could likewise see him and Moorfi silhouetted against that self-same sky. So he ran lightly over the barren rocks due west, until a dip in the terrain hid the shaft-mouth from his view, and by the same token hid him and Moorfi from the watchers at the shaft.

Then he circled rapidly, watching the stars like a true mariner for guidance as to his direction, until he was east of the shaft. And, as that direction was down hill from the shaft-mouth, he knew that he and his black companion were invisible. Glancing back over his shoulders he saw the pursuing horde emerge from the opening and set off on a run due west. He and Moorfi hurried on in the general direction of the City of Gold.

They reached the lowlands without mishap, and without further signs of pursuit; and proceeded, under the velvet sky

and twinkling stars, toward the lights of a little village which they could see in the distance. The moon began to rise ahead of them beyond the village.

Suddenly they found their way barred by a line of figures which seemed to spring from the very earth. And each of these figures brandished a spear.

"Halt!" cried one of them. "Who are you?"

Mayhew and his companion halted.

"I am a peaceful gentleman traveling at night with his black servant," he answered. "Let us pass."

He glanced keenly up and down the line, to size up the situation—and suddenly realized that he had seen this spot before! That peculiarly gnarled willow tree flanked by a group of bushes which vaguely resembled a hen—he had seen it often before, through the crystal globe and the sphere of worluk smoke of his master the Spider. His enemy had located him!

"Follow me, Moorfi, and do as I do," he commanded in a low tone; then more loudly; "These men seem to be perfectly friendly, and I am sure will let us pass." And he began to advance upon them.

"Halt!" again commanded the spearman most directly in front of him.

For reply Mayhew hurled his own spear, and the man went down.

"Come on, Moorfi!" he shouted, drawing his sword and leaping forward.

Moorfi followed, driving his own spear into one of the yellow men who was converging dangerously upon Mayhew.

They got through the line with only a few minor cuts, after having accounted for two more of the enemy.

Mayhew, in the lead, heard a groaning cry, "Master!" behind him; and, looking over his shoulder, saw that the faithful Moorfi was lying prone, with the haft of a spear protruding from between his shoulder blades. Instantly the American halted his mad flight and rushed back to place himself between the prostrate body of his friend and the horde of yellow men who were swarming toward it. Then they were upon him, and he went down beneath the force of their impact. Something struck him on the head, and he knew no more.

When he came to his senses again it was still night.

Mayhew's head ached and throbbed as he lay and waited for the last of the enemy to disappear; then he tried to roll over toward the prostrate body of his faithful black servant. But he could not move; he was pinned to the ground. Looking up, he saw the shaft of a spear protruding into the air from his own left breast.

CHAPTER XX

TO SAVE THE WORLD

IT IS startling enough to come to one's senses after a battle, and find one's self lying on one's back impaled to the ground by an enemy spear. But it is even more startling to then realize that one feels no pain from the wound.

Mayhew gingerly reached up both hands, seized the shaft of the spear and gave it a gentle and tentative wiggle. Still no pain. He wiggled it some more, and it rubbed against the left side of his chest and the inside of his arm. Whoever had attempted to deliver the coup-de-grâce to him had in the moonlight mistaken the billowing folds of his toga for his own form, and had driven the spear in at the wrong place, thus hurting him not at all, although securely pinning him to the ground.

By dint of considerable effort he was finally able to wrench the spear free and throw it to one side. Then he crawled slowly and inconspicuously over the body of the Negro. For, so far as he knew, the Spider on his skull-topped, blood-red throne might still be intently watching this scene through his crystal-gazing globe.

The poor black man was completely still and dead. The tears welled up into Mayhew's eyes. Here had been a loyal servant, a true friend. But there was no time to dispose of the body; furthermore a burial would be far too conspicuous, with the Spider looking on. So, after reciting what few snatches he could remember from the invocation to the sun god, and the Christian litany for burial at sea. and throwing a handful of dirt upon the massive black body which would never fight again for its native Mu, Mayhew crept swiftly away. Still no sign of pursuit.

A cloud passed across the face of the moon, and instantly the young American sprang to his feet and ran—ran until the moon came out again. But by that time he believed that he had gotten far enough away from the gnarled willow and the hen-bush to be out of sight of the Spider, so he continued to run instead of drop-

ping down and crawling onward again.

Thus at last he reached the village. Fortunately there were a few coins in the pouch which hung from the sword-belt he had taken from one of his two yellow captives. It was just about enough to pay his way to the city if he ate sparingly, so he washed at the inn, had the cut on his head dressed, slept for a few hours, and took the first elephant-stage the next morning for the Golden City.

At last he was home—and somehow this city of gold now was more his home than New Bedford, a city which seemed to have vanished off the earth.

Then he reached the ornate carved gold doors of the house of Julo. A lump of homesick joy arose in his throat as he mounted the steps and reached for the knocker. But the knocker was gone from its accustomed place, and the doors were barred and sealed.

No Julo! No home! What could have happened? His eyes misty, Mayhew stumbled down the steps.

A man was passing by, down the street. Mayhew hailed him.

"What has become of the house of Julo?"

"Sealed by the authorities," the man replied. "Try the next door on the left."

Then, with an expression on his face as though suddenly he realized that he had given too much information to the wrong person, the man hurried away.

Mayhew tried the next house, as directed. The doors swung open, and he darted eagerly forward, only to find the way barred by two black men with drawn scimitars.

"Don't you know me?" Mayhew asked the men who faced him, for both of them were servants whom he recognized.

"The house of Julo in these days is not open to strangers," replied one of the blacks.

Well, at least it was the house of Julo!

"Is Julo well, and his gracious wife Marta?" Mayhew asked.

"Both are well," the Negro replied. "but strangers are not permitted to enter. Who are you, and what is your errand? Look, he wears an iron belt instead of one of gold! He is a spider-man!"

At this announcement both servants raised their scimitars. Mayhew drew his sword and fell back a pace.

Calling them both by name he exclaimed, "I am Adams Mayhew! I captured this belt in a fight with spider-men. But no more of this foolishness! Send for Julo, and let him identify me!"

"Will you hand over your sword and submit to search?" asked one of the Negroes, still incredulous.

For reply Mayhew flung his broadsword at their feet and held his arms aloft, so that they were soon satisfied that, even though he might not be the missing Adamo Mayho, he was at least completely unarmed and harmless. They led him within and sent for their master.

Julo came with his usual stately tread; but as soon as his eyes set upon Mayhew he rushed forward, flung his arms around his neck, and sobbed, "My son! My son! You have returned to me."

Mayhew was much touched, and not a little embarrassed. To relieve his confusion he announced, "I have important information for the government."

"Important though it may be," replied the kindly Julo, "I refuse to listen to a word of it until you have bathed and shaved and changed and rested. But you had better keep that square-cut beard. It will come in handy, if you ever have to return again to the caves of Pele."

Mayhew shuddered. The caves of Pele! Was he not yet through with the gruesome Spider?

Then he was led away to the showers and swimming pool. Finally, bathed and shaved, and dressed in a clean toga, he returned to the reception hall, to find that quite a group of people had gathered there in his absence. But, of them all, he saw only one. Eleria! Eleria of the blue eyes, honey-colored hair, and cameo features.

At the sight of her he sprang forward and held out his arms; but she shyly and sadly shook her yellow head and held out her hand to him. And then he noticed that Porto was standing beside her. Somehow he had forgotten Porto.

But, after all, Porto was his friend; and Porto hadn't won Eleria from him—yet. So he greeted them both, and then turned and greeted Marta. He acknowledged the salutations of the rest of the group, men of high government position who had been active in organizing the recent expedition against the Spider.

Rapidly the developments of the past two days were sketched for the benefit of the newcomer.

It seemed that the Spider had again placarded the city with notices, this time announcing that he was now ready to destroy the world, but that he was will-

ing to hold off for a little while longer in order to give the world a chance to arrange with him the terms of its surrender to him. If Mu, instead of parleying, should choose to fight, he would still withhold the final stroke so long as his own forces were victorious.

But if—which Pele forbid—the forces of Mu should triumph, then most assuredly the Spider would destroy the world.

Of course, no one believed that the Spider, for all his uncanny powers, could destroy the world, or even any appreciable part of the continent of Mu; but when Mayhew, cutting in on their narrative, explained the Spider's diabolical plan for the flooding of the eternal fires with sea-water, the crowd sobered.

Several scientists present admitted that the scheme held dire possibilities.

Then the narrative continued. Inasmuch as the authorities now knew, from information given them by Mayhew, the exact location of many of the spots which the menacing alchemist was wont to visualize in his crystal gazing-globe, they had watched and guarded those spots; and, as a result, had actually waylaid and killed many of the emissaries who had been sent through the worluk screen to post notices.

Now these places were barricaded off and guarded, and no one was permitted to go to them. This accounted for the condition in which Mayhew had found his old home upon his return.

He now checked over their list, and added several more places, including the river bank by the village of Forbosa and the gnarled willow tree on the mountainside.

Other cities throughout the empire were reported to be taking the same precautions, and a huge army was being recruited to march against the caves.

THE next few weeks sped very quickly. There still were assassinations; but one by one the Spider's worluk-spots were located and were closed to him, until finally the only way in which he could distribute proclamations was to throw them through the smoke-haze into the proscribed spots; any one of his minions who had ventured through would have been instantly killed.

Mayhew was kept very busy, chiefly in checking up information about the Spider. But he managed to see quite a lot of Eleria; who, however, distributed her favors quite impartially between him and his friend and double, Porto.

Porto wasn't quite his double these days, for Porto was cleanshaven, whereas Adams Mayhew still wore his Egyptian beard, which he abominated, as preparation for a possible return to the caves.

At last the expedition, fully organized, set out. Similar forces were converging upon the mountains of Pele from every other city of the continent.

And when the advance up the actual slopes of the mountain began, great care was taken to avoid known menaces. The men advanced in widely spaced skirmish lines, so that wherever lava and gas were poured forth suddenly upon them, only a few were killed. Remembering the sad fate of the other expedition, valleys were avoided. Cliffs from which rocks might be hurled were flanked.

Occasionally an advance party would be attacked from the rear by yellow men appearing miraculously from nowhere. But, whenever this happened, the far-flung communication lines of the Muians located the worluk-spot and thereafter it was guarded night and day, and thus rendered impotent.

It was slow work, fighting inch by inch almost, up the barren mountainsides, but

the steady advance continued, until one day a soldier guarding one of the worluk spots brought to headquarters a paper which he had found clutched in the hand of an enemy spearman who had suddenly materialized before him, and had been killed by him. It bore the repulsive Spider-crest, and was very brief. It said, "You win. And now I will destroy the earth."

Somehow, in their intentness on their steady advance, every one had forgotten the threat that victory meant destruction.

A hurried council was held, in the midst of which a steady drone in the sky began and became louder and louder as it approached. It was one of the huge mechanical dragonflies of the priesthood of Ra.

All conversation ceased, for these airships, although well known, were seldom seen, and the uncanny thought of man being able to fly always filled the bystanders with awe and dread of the supernatural.

The machine in question lander near the group, and Grand High Priest Alvo alighted from it and joined them. He had come to bless their cause.

And suddenly the arrival of the venerable prelate gave Adams Mayhew an idea.

"How many men will that flying machine hold?" he asked.

"Six, besides the driver," was the reply.

"Could it land in the mountains?"

"It can land anywhere."

Quickly he sketched his plan. It was to pick out the five best swordsmen in the expeditionary forces, and then fly them and Mayhew to the mouth of the shaft which led down into the heart of the mountains. Mayhew could direct them through the tunnels, while the flying machine flew back and forth bringing more and yet more reenforcements. Perhaps in this way they could reach the dam which held back the tides of ocean from the eternal fires of Pele, before the Spider caused this dam to be blasted away.

Alvo assented and the first squad was gathered, and hastily clambered into the silver body of the huge dragon-fly. Brave men though they were, their faces paled as, with a deafening roar, the thing left the ground.

To Mayhew the actual fact that he was flying probably seemed more truly remarkable than to the native Muians, but he did not have their superstitious dread of it. To them it represented the work of supernatural and uncanny forces controlled by the priesthood, and was on a par with the worluk of the Spider.

Accordingly Mayhew was the first to recover from that sinking feeling in the pit of the stomach which the departure from the ground had given them. He glanced over the side at the sun-kissed field, and noted that they seemed to be a blue-green, rather than the customary yellow-green when viewed from the ground. The houses seemed garishly painted blocks of wood. The rivers and ponds were black, instead of silver-blue. The whole scene below reminded him of a toy village which he had once owned as a child, with tinted excelsior for grass.

And when the flying machine bent to the wind—or so Mayhew from his nautical experience conceived it—the toy landscapes below seemed to tip and slide up to one side, while the ship of the air kept an even keel.

In a minute or two they were over the foothills and nosing sharply up toward the heights. Mayhew seized a speaking tube—he knew what they were, for he had seen them running from bridge to engine room on steamboats—and directed the navigator of the flying machine toward the opening of the shaft which was their destination.

But as he drew near it he was surprised to see a crowd of several hundred spider-men congregated there. This introduced a complication. Perhaps the Spider, through his uncanny spy system, had already learned of their venture, and had laid his plans to anticipate them.

If so, however, his plans were vain; for as the flying machine swooped down, these minions of the enemy scattered in every direction, and scuttled off over the rocks in very evident abject terror.

The space around the shaft was now practically deserted. Not completely deserted, however; for there, on a wooden replica of the red-marble skull-topped throne of the caves below, sat the Spider, squat and hunched and repulsive, croaking out orders which were not even being heard, much less obeyed.

THE airship landed and Adams Mayhew stepped out. The five soldiers were still too mentally and spiritually shaken to accompany him; but the Spider was alone, unarmed and unguarded.

Mayhew strode over to the throne.

"Your excellency," he shouted, "at last

we have you at our mercy. Quick, countermand your order to destroy the world. If not, I shall have to kill you."

A crafty grin spread over the hook-nosed face.

"And how can I send the order, Adamo Mayho," the creature croaked, "since you have scattered all my faithless followers?"

"Give me your signet ring as a token," the American replied, "and I will take your message."

"And if I refuse?"

"Then I shall have to kill you, take the ring by force, and compose my own message."

"Mayho," said the Spider fiercely, "you forget that I am invulnerable."

"And you forget that you yourself once told me that the secret of your invulnerability lies only in a certain shirt which you wear beneath your black jersey jacket. But come! No more temporizing! Give me the ring and the message!"

Mayhew began to draw his sword. But he never finished.

The creature's left hand suddenly gripped the arm of the throne, his body stiffened, and his right arm with fingers extended shot out toward Adams Mayhew. A surge of disembodied force seemed to strike the young man squarely on the chest, staggering him backward a pace and paralyzing his will.

"I am still master here," hissed the Spider triumphantly. "And now you will do as I command."

"Yes, master," said Mayhew's voice, in a singsong sleep-walking tone. He did not consciously say the words; in fact he strove to hold them back; but they came out in spite of him.

"Good!" ejaculated the Spider, a crooked smile playing across his thin lips. "And now," he exulted, "at last I have the ship of the air, for which I tried to bargain with the Grand High Priest. With it I can fly to safety."

By this time the five soldiers and the pilot had gotten out of the flying machine and were approaching the throne.

But Mayhew suddenly found a stronger will than his own speaking through his mouth, "You five soldiers hurry down into that shaft, where you will await me at the bottom. This is a situation which I prefer to handle myself. And you, navigator, come over here."

With some grumbling and uncertainty the soldiers departed for the shaft and the pilot approached the throne.

Out shot the Spider's other hand, and he held two men by his will, instead of one.

Mayhew's brain raced madly, thinking clearly in a detached sort of way, but totally unable to control either his speech or his actions. If only another of the Spider's epileptic fits would come on. But no such luck. That had saved him once. Too much of a coincidence to expect that it would save him again.

The Spider was speaking to the pilot, "Draw your sword and kill Adamo Mayho. Then pick me up and carry me to your ship. It is my will."

The bemused pilot started to draw.

CHAPTER XXI

THE SPIDER DIES

AS THE Muian aviator raised his sword under the influence of the mesmeric powers of that deformed paralytic, Mayhew was powerless to move or to protect himself. The Spider's evil eyes gleamed with revenge. But he had been too eager for his vengeance; he should have waited just a few minutes more.

For the five soldiers had not quite yet reached the shaft-mouth, and one of them happened to glance back. And then things began to happen. This soldier was a skillful swordsman, and a knife thrower as well, and in an instant his keen blade was hurtling through the air, straight at the luckless pilot.

But the Spider too saw the weapon coming, and exerted his will to cause the pilot to step to one side. The sword missed its mark by a hairbreadth and went clattering off down the rocks. However, the side-stepping of the pilot saved Mayhew from his blow; and before the Spider could will the man back again to the attack the five soldiers were upon him.

Swiftly moved the hypnotically fluttering fingers as the evil creature swept them all into his power. The unfortunate pilot had been killed in the onslaught, but in his place the Spider now had five new automatons to do his bidding.

However, in all the excitement and flurry and difficulty of directing his will upon five different men at once, the Spider must have forgotten to keep Adams Mayhew under control. At all events, the young American suddenly felt his own efforts for freedom bear fruit.

With a gasp he wrenched his feet free from the spell which bound them. Then

drew his sword and drove it into the throat of the menace of Mu.

As the creature died, its eyes turned pitifully toward its slayer, the man whom it had once trusted and befriended; and Mayhew felt a momentary pang of disloyalty. Then he remembered the crimes of which the Spider had been guilty, and the even grosser crimes which the Spider had contemplated; and his pity and self-condemnation were changed to wild exultation.

There still was time to save the world!

Snatching off the signet ring of the dying Spider, Mayhew shouted to the five soldiers, now out of their trance again, to bring torches from the plane. Then the six of them rushed toward the opening of the caves. Their entrance was unopposed.

As they rushed through the dark corridors, with their flaring torches held aloft, the thought kept echoing in Mayhew's ears, "There still is time!"

At last they reached the spot where the excavations of the Spider had left only one thin wall of rock between the waters of the ocean and the fires of Pele. A squad of workers, led by an overseer, were just hurrying away from the scene. Mayhew rushed up to them.

Holding out the hand which bore the signet ring of the Spider, he shouted, "By the orders of his excellency, the explosion must stop."

"Back! Back!" replied the foreman. "It is too late."

With a frightful roar in that confined space, the retaining wall crumbled. The overseer and his squad dashed by, and Mayhew and his five men turned and followed. Pele and Ocean had been joined!

Behind them could be heard a deafening hissing. The whole cave filled with steam. And then an ever growing chaos of explosions began to occur behind them, increasing in frequency and intensity. The ground shook beneath their feet as they ran. The walls heaved and buckled. Pieces of ceiling fell.

The crescendo of explosions by now had merged into one continuous roar, like that of a tropical thunderstorm. Crevasses opened, which they had to jump.

And then with a showering avalanche of rock the entire passageway collapsed in front of them, completely barring the way. They were trapped in the crumbling caves of Pele!

Like madmen, Mayhew's five companions flung themselves frantically against the barrier.

But he shouted to them above the din, "Come back! There must be other ways out of this mountain. Keep your heads, men. We're not whipped until we're dead. Come on! Let's find a way."

So back they rushed again. Back toward the turmoil which was causing all this disaster.

They met a group of fleeing, terror-crazed spider-men. Mayhew stopped these newcomers, exhibited his signet of authority, calmed them, and informed them that the tunnel was barred.

"Tolofo," said one of the yellow men, "I know a detour back to the throne room. From there, there are other little-used passages leading to the surface."

"Lead on!" commanded "Tolofo."

Upon arriving at the throne room they found it and the surrounding caves packed with struggling, jostling, yellow humanity. And, in their midst, the centurion Tirio, vainly striving to calm them and learn some way of escape out of that crumbling roaring chaos.

As Adams Mayhew strode into the throne room at the head of his little group, Tirio shouted, "Seize him! Seize the impostor, in the name of his excellency!"

But Mayhew held up the signet ring and replied, "What right have you to speak for his excellency? Behold the seal of your master! I am in command here. Ho, men, seize and bind the centurion!"

But one of the five Muian soldiers who had accompanied Mayhew had no more sense than to add, "Anyway, the Spider is dead."

A hush fell over the jostling crowd.

"In which case," shouted Tirio, "you stole the ring."

The sullen spider-men glanced from one to the other of the two men who claimed their leadership. It was a toss-up as to which the fickle mob would throw its support.

But before they could decide, Mayhew held up his hand and said, "A truce, O Tirio. All ways out must be barred, or you and this throng would not still be here. The mountain is cracking and trembling. I alone can save us."

"How?" sneered Tirio.

"By worluk. Let me mount the throne, and I will get you out of here. Not only out of here, but far from this mountain and its menace."

"Agreed!" shouted the centurion, clapping his hands in command. "Quick! Bring worluk powder!"

It was pure bluff on Mayhew's part; for, although under the tutoring of the evil alchemist he had mastered the art of crystal gazing, he never yet had made worluk.

NEVERTHELESS, with an assumed air of confidence, he ascended the skull-topped blood-red throne and concentrated his gaze on the little globe of glass.

"What do you see?" anxiously asked Tirio, taking up a position beside the throne.

"The public square of the Golden City," Mayhew replied, "roped off and heavily guarded."

"I can send my troops through and overwhelm them."

"You won't be given the chance," Mayhew coolly replied. *"I'm* the Spider now, and there's not going to be any more fighting."

He swept the vision away with a wave of his hand, and concentrated again.

"Ah, that is better," said he. "The courtyard of Julo's house, and only a small guard. I'll send some white men through first, to explain the situation to them."

By this time the bowl of worluk powder had been brought and lighted. Mayhew waved his hand imperiously; and to his own intense surprise, the ascending smoke promptly took on a globular form.

The room heaved and shook, the torches quivered and smoked, and the din of volcanic explosions and splintering rock had by now become almost deafening. Yet, by a supreme effort of his will, Mayhew held steady the ball of worluk smoke. It cleared, and Julo's courtyard could be seen by all. The throng rushed toward it.

"Back!" shouted Mayhew above the din. "Any one who attempts to penetrate the smoke screen without my permission will vanish."

The superstitious yellow men promptly edged away.

"Now," he commanded, "you five Muian soldiers go through, and explain the truce."

With blanched faces they obeyed. They could be seen talking with the guards, then staring back with unseeing bewilderment. Mayhew ordered a yellow spearman through, and saw the man enter the courtyard unmolested.

"Your turn, Tirio," he announced.

The centurion clenched his fists and steeled himself to step through into safety. Then, in single rank, the survivors of the forces of the Spider poured into the ball of smoke.

The ceiling of the throne room began to disintegrate. The heat became oppressive, the air so sulphurous that Mayhew could hardly breathe.

A hissing, sizzling sound could be heard on his left. Mayhew did not turn to gaze from the globe of smoke before him, but out of the corner of his eye he could see the front edge of a sluggish river of lava enter through one of the doorways and slowly approach the throne.

Only a handful of yellow men remained. And then Mayhew suddenly remembered something which the Spider had once told him: "And even if I were not a cripple, I could not hold the ball of worluk smoke intact while I myself passed through it."

Mayhew had saved the others by means of his Spider-taught mystic powers. He himself was trapped in the caves of Pele!

The last yellow man passed through. Mayhew leaned back on the throne, relaxing slightly, and sighed. Then the wall behind him collapsed, hurling him forward onto the floor and into the fast-vanishing worluk sphere.

CHAPTER XXII

CHAOS!

WHEN Mayhew came to his senses again he lay securely bound on the stone flagging of Julo's courtyard. The ground trembled slightly from distant earthquake shocks. Above him stood Tirio, leering down at him.

"Thank you for getting me out of the caves of Pele," said the rat-faced centurion. "And it may interest you to know that you've enabled me to do what I've always tried to persuade the Spider to attempt—attack the Muians from the rear by means of worluk. I am now the master of the Golden City."

Mayhew groaned.

"Fool!" he said. "Mu is being racked to pieces by volcanic upheavals, yet you still prate of war and mastery. I thought that we had declared a truce."

"The truce is off," Tirio succinctly announced, as he turned on his heel and left the courtyard.

Under heavy guard Mayhew was placed in one of the bedrooms of the house which faced toward the west, toward the mountains of Pele, smoking ominously in the distance. The mountain and the land around it seemed to tremble and heave.

Then, as Mayhew gazed, there burst forth in the midst of this scene a tiny flame, which spread and grew and mounted, until it became a mighty roaring pillar of fire, several miles in diameter, and rising to the clouds.

These clouds changed to black smoke, which overshadowed the entire land and became shot with many lightnings, blending strangely with the red glare of the pillar of fire. Then from the northward a tidal wave rushed across the intervening space. The house began to rock and shake.

The setting sun appeared beneath the pall of smoke and lingered upon the horizon like a ball of fire, red and angry looking. And well might he be angry at the devastation which Pele, the bride whom he had scorned, was wreaking upon his beloved land.

For a while the sun-god lingered to watch the holocaust which he was powerless to avert; then, as though with a shrug of resignation, he sank beneath the waves. Deep dark night, lit by the hell-fires of Pele and the silver flashes of lightning, settled over land and sea.

During the night most of what was left of Mu was torn asunder and rent to pieces. The central pillar of fire died down, its force spent; but in all directions could be seen and heard the flash and roar of many relatively small explosions, each destroying forever a section of the land.

Down, down sank the continent of Mu into the eternal fires of Pele; and as it sank, the seas rushed in and overwhelmed it, causing more explosions as the water seeped into the volcanic pits.

When morning came—when Ra rose once more from the sea, redder even than on the evening before—he disclosed a steaming, smoking expanse of waves beneath a sky of crimson-tinted, billowing smoke. The Golden City alone stood intact. Here and there in the distance, island peaks projected from the sea; and occasionally huge bubbles, miles in extent, would belch upward. The water was thick with mud, and the air was so filled with sulphur fumes as to be almost unbreathable.

Then the sun passed upward into the

The ground heaved so that they could scarcely keep their feet. All about them buildings toppled and were crushed to earth

overhanging pall of smoke and the whole surface of the deep was plunged into night once more.

DURING the night and day and night of horror, Mayhew remained under guard. Food was brought him from time to time. Occasionally he slept. But his captors refused to tell him any news of what was going on in the city.

On the second morning his double, Porto, was thrust, battered and bleeding, into his cell. It seems that Porto with some others of the army had fled to their ships when the eruption had started. The tidal wave had swept them close to the Golden City. There they had landed, to be immediately set upon by the forces of Tirio, whom they unexpectedly found to be in control. Porto and a few others had been captured. The rest scattered.

Later in the morning Mayhew and Porto were led out of the house, through the streets, and into the public square. The streets were nearly deserted, but the square was thronged with yellow men, thugs of Tirio, and a few miscellaneous Mulans. Tirio sat in state on a golden throne, and by his side stood Eleria, her hands bound.

"The heavenly twins have come to see you, my dear," bantered Tirio, indicating Mayhew and Porto with a wave of his hand. "And now I have a proposition to put to you. You have declined the honor of becoming my queen. You have very bravely refused to yield to threats, and for that display of courage I love you all the more. So now I am going to buy your love, and at the same time get a little fun out of watching your choice. If you will agree to marry me peacefully and willingly, I will spare the life of *one* of your two friends. Which one shall it be?"

"You will spare him, in return for my promise?" asked the girl.

"Well, not exactly. But if you marry me, I give you my word of honor that he shall then go free. Which of the twins is it to be?"

"Honor?" contemptuously replied Eleria. "You do not know what it is."

The rat face went white, and Porto and Mayhew both smiled grimly.

"Wipe that grin off!" shrieked Tirio, and two attendants slapped them across their mouths.

Eleria then said conciliatingly, "I am sorry, Tirio, that I spoke so hastily, but I have suffered much and am not altogether responsible for what I say. Let me make you a counter proposition. Release both of them, and I will marry you gladly and willingly."

"No!" cried the two prisoners in unison, and Mayhew added, as his eye lighted on a small object on the ground in front of him. "We can take care of ourselves."

Tirio by this time had regained his composure.

"You think so?" he sneered. "And how do you propose to take care of yourself, Adamo Mayho?"

The crowd guffawed.

"If you weren't a coward, you'd come down off that throne and fight me," Mayhew replied. "I'll fight you with swords, at which you are reputed an expert. Or I'll fight you with my bare hands the way I did that day on the wharves over a year ago."

There were several snickers in the crowd, and Tirio stiffened. Then he grinned diabolically. He knew how to turn this into a joke and thus appeal to his followers.

"I tell you what," he said. "Were it not for my duty to these men who have chosen me to rule over them, I would gladly risk my life to settle old scores with you on even terms. But I'll give you a chance. Fight me as you are, but with my having a sword, and let the winner take the girl. What say you?"

"I'll do it!" said the American with surprising eagerness. "But what guarantee will you give that you will go through with the bargain if I win?"

Tirio was a bit taken back by this ready acceptance of his preposterous offer. But his confusion was covered up by Porto's asking: "Where do I come in on this?"

"Oh, if you wish, you can fight the winner," Tirio declaimed with an airy wave of the hand. "Well, let's get going."

"No! No!" begged Eleria. "Don't kill them. I'll marry you."

"You'll do that, anyway," asserted Tirio grimly. "On with the fight!"

He stepped down from his throne and began to draw his sword.

"Just a minute," hastily interposed Mayhew. "My sandal is untied."

Dropping to one knee, he tugged at the leather thong. It came loose. Then picking up something else, he arose to his feet.

Round and round his head Mayhew swung his right arm. Tirio stared, his sword half-drawn.

Mayhew's arm suddenly ceased its gyrations and lashed out toward his enemy. The leather thong fluttered from Mayhew's hand.

Tirio's sword clattered to the cobblestones and he slumped into a soundless heap, while blood streamed from a cut on his forehead. Mayhew's childhood practice with a sling, years ago in New Bedford, had not been in vain.

For a moment every one, including the victor, stood motionless. Then an angry growl broke from the crowd. But the sound was drowned in another growl, as the earth began to tremble and shake. A few bricks fell into the square. The surrounding buildings began to totter. Panic stricken, the crowd fled.

Mayhew snatched up Tirio's sword and cut Eleria's bonds, and the three friends hastened away.

The ground heaved so that they could scarcely keep their feet. All about them buildings were crashing to earth. It was a miracle that they got out of the city alive.

At last they dragged themselves onto a little hill on the outskirts and gazed back at what was left of the once proud Golden City, now an indescribable chaos of fallen masonry, sprinkled with fires. But the fires were short-lived, for the city was settling fast, and even as the fugitives gazed, the sea swept in and engulfed it all.

The Golden City was no more.

Several hundred survivors occupied the hill, now an island, and among these survivors they found Julo and Marta. Then night fell.

IN THE lurid red light of the volcanic morning, Julo instinctively took command of the little community. A small boat had drifted ashore in the night. It turned out to be equipped and provisioned.

Julo said, "Two of us must take this boat, search for the nearest undestroyed land, and send back help. And, even if help should fail to reach us, two of us will at least have been saved. Let us draw lots. The winner can choose his companion."

So the drawing was held, and Adams Mayhew won.

"I choose Eleria," he promptly said.

But she sadly shook her head as she replied, "No, Adamo dear. You are my very best friend in all the world; but, if you will forgive me, I will stay here with Porto, whom I love." And she put her hand through Porto's arm.

Mayhew gulped, then turning to Julo, asked, "Is the lot transferable?"

"I don't know why not."

"Then I transfer it to my good friend Porto, and to his bride."

So Porto and Eleria were duly married at high noon by the magistrate Julo, according to the ritual of Ra, and they set forth that same day in the little boat. A gentle wind bore them steadily westward and Adams Mayhew watched with aching heart until their boat was a mere speck on the horizon.

Long after all the others had left the shore and gone inland, Mayhew sat on the beach and stared moodily at the western horizon, which concealed his two friends. The tide rose, and he moved away from it. Then he noticed that the tide seemed to be rising with unusual speed.

Faster and faster came the waters. Mayhew left the shore and scrambled up the hill. And then it dawned on him that the trouble was not that the waters were rising. On the contrary, the land was settling!

Horrified, he ran to warn his friends, though what good a warning would do them he did not stop to consider.

But the warning was never delivered. The land heaved, and cracked, and threw him to his knees. The sea reached in and engulfed him and swept him away, whirling him over and over, blinding and choking him. Madly he fought his way to the surface; and at last he made it, and lay there spitting and coughing and drawing deep breaths of air into his tortured lungs.

Then he looked around him. The island and all his friends were gone! He was alone in the midst of the Pacific Ocean!

But in the western distance there rose from the horizon a thin column of smoke. This smoke steadily approached him, until he could see the steamer from which it emanated. The steamer bore down upon him. He waved and shouted. The steamer stopped and lowered a boat.

When he was safely aboard the first questions were in a strange tongue which no one could understand. Then some one asked him in English for his name.

He told them: "Adams Mayhew of the whaling barque Alaska."

"Shipwrecked?"

"No. Fell overboard."

"When?"

"September, 1891."

At which there were many significant glances, and one man exclaimed, "But, my dear fellow, this is 1932!"

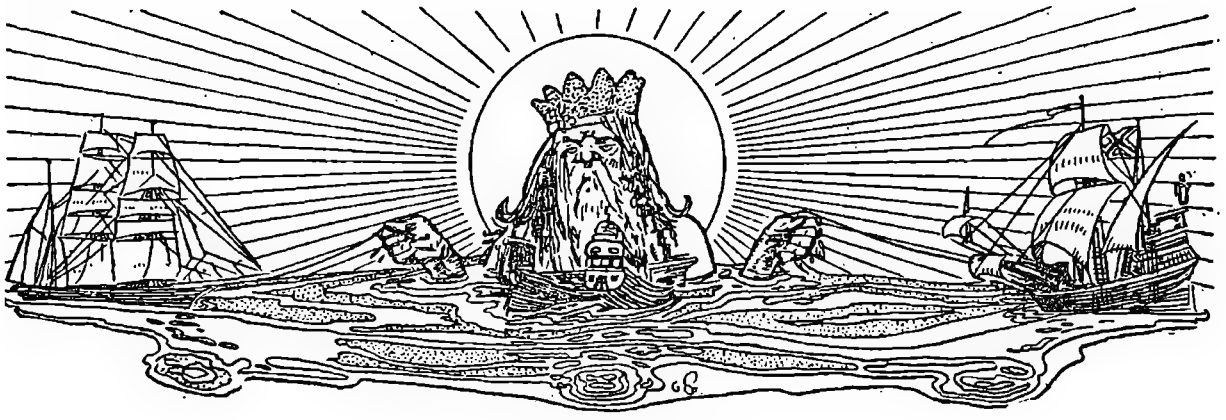
"Where have you been all this while?" asked some one else sarcastically.

"On the continent of Mu," he replied with open-faced simplicity.

"Oh, you've been reading one of Col. Churchward's books. Mu was destroyed by earthquakes and sank beneath the waves *twenty-five thousand* years ago!"

Adams Mayhew had never heard of Churchward; but he deemed it best to keep the story of his adventure to himself, until he found a sympathetic listener in me.

The End



Atlantis

TALL, spectral masts, with shreds of tattered sail,
Gaunt hulls and decks washed white with years of rain;
Carved prows and figures worn by storm and gale,
And caravels that seek not home again;

A broken rudder and a battered wheel;
Snapped links of chains, and anchors rusty red
Rise with the tide or sink with rotting keel,
Laden with spoils of cities burned and dead.

There floats a galley of the years gone by;
Here swings a newer hull with funnels black;
Afar a bell buoy tolleth like a cry
For all the ships that sailed and came not back.

High on the slope of distant, shining hills
The grass is marked with little mounds of gray;
A strange, sweet fragrance all the evening fills
With memories of some gone yesterday.

And that one lighthouse that no man may see!
Lone hearts for years their weary vigils keep
Across the wave that cometh ceaselessly
From that dim island where lost sailors sleep!

—John James Meehan

The Editor's Page

OUR many readers have expressed curiosity concerning which of the Munsey classics are scheduled for 1943, the opening of our fourth year.

January—next month's issue—will bring you the much demanded sequel of "Polaris—of the Snows," by Charles Stilson. The sequel is "Minos of Sardanes" and it is a very great story in itself.

"The Mouthpiece of Zitu," second of the "Palos" group, was published in the November 1942 issue. We expect to follow it very soon with the third story, "Jason, Son of Jason." And the last of the "Polaris" group—"Polaris and the Goddess Glorian" appears on an early schedule.

Perhaps the most exciting announcement of all is that A. Merritt's magnificent "The Ship of Ishtar" is planned for the February issue, to be followed immediately by a great and much demanded epic of fantasy, "The Second Deluge" by Garrett P. Serviss.

Among the novelets which will appear soon is "Toys of Fate" by Tod Robbins, a glamorous little masterpiece, beautifully executed to suit the taste of the most fastidious fantasy collector.

A clever poll of "wanted" stories was made by Acree Brown of Indiana. We published it in the October issue. Among the most demanded stories were the "Palos" sequel and "Into the Infinite." The latter began in the same issue with Mr. Brown's letter, and the first mentioned story appeared last month. Also among the most "wanted" was "The Ship of Ishtar," now scheduled for the month after next, and one of the four most wanted stories comes next month—the "Polaris" sequel.

We note that George Allan England's "The Empire of the Air" and "The Flying Legion" are high on Mr. Brown's list. The latter story is a very great adventure classic, although through its strange magnificence of conception it has been classified as a fantastic story. It is very long and would make a fine serial or two-part possibility for our book if the readers would like to have it soon.

The opinions on the "Complete Moon Pool" for future publication seem to be greatly divided, but indications are that it will be welcome to a large public and acceptable to them some time in 1943.

The second Finlay portfolio can also be put down as a forthcoming attraction of next year.

My sincere thanks to FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES' readers for their long and enthusiastic friendship. And may I now extend warm greetings and best wishes for the year to come?

Mary Gnaedinger

EDITOR.

Into the Infinite

By Austin Hall

Part III

He was greater than St. George of dragon fame; he was without hope of salvation; he cared not that he was standing alone against the evils of all darkness. He asked for no succor; he was defiant. He believed he would conquer, alone, by his will and his flashing genius

After his adventures with George Witherspoon, the Rebel Soul, Walter Warren became a prosperous banker, and lived happily with his wife and Roselle.

The Master, the leader of the Order of Sevens, told Walter that George had become an internationally famous criminal, and was known as "The King of Thieves." But he was sure that, unmoral and unfettered by man-made laws as he was, George had a great power for good in his nature, and unknown and unearthly powers for either good or evil. The master received Walter's promise of assistance in redeeming him.

One night George came to Walter's house, and begged him to do what he could to save him from himself, at the same time warning him that in the future he would seek to do him harm. One of the children was sick, and George cured him and left a valuable emerald in his hand. He met Roselle, and they loved each other at sight.

Walter received warning that Witherspoon was going to rob his bank. He received assistance from Simpson, the slow-witted chief of police, and Wilkins, a detective connected with the Order of the Sevens, and working under the Master's orders, who had trailed George in many lands without being able to arrest him. But in spite of them the bank was looted on the night of a ball, and later in the evening George appeared at Walter's house and carried off Roselle.

The Master went in search of George and Roselle. Two years passed. Then Walter's wife received a letter from Roselle saying that she and George were married and happy, and telling of their life. In Russia George was a prince; in Germany a baron, a colonel of Uhlans, and pet of the Kaiser. While in Berlin he received a mysterious visitor, and from their conversation Roselle had learned that it was through selling his soul to this evil personage that George derived his supernatural powers, and that he had grown so strong that the other could no longer control him. The shadow of war was already falling over Germany, and Roselle had induced George to go to France. There he had become the friend of statesmen, a leader of men, and successful in finance. One day in Paris they saw the Master, and George told Roselle that he would call on them at their hotel that evening. "But before he comes there is something that I must tell you," he said.

Roselle's letter, dated June 1900, is continued in this instalment.

CHAPTER XXIX

"I HAVE SOLD MY SOUL"

THAT was the beginning. How was I to know that he was about to make a sort of confession? We returned to our rooms. George lit a cigar; he always smoked after eating. I could not read, and I was too excited to do much more than to sit in a tremor of impatience.

It was about eight o'clock. Outside the electric lights were beginning to blaze into the darkness. The rumble and noise of the streets, the strange hum of the city, the strident cross-currents of artificial life accentuated my eagerness. What was he about to tell me?

But he said nothing. I drew the curtains and came over and sat beside him. It is the one pastime of which I never grow weary—to sit and watch him. He is not like other men—I am always hungry for his beauty.

Copyright 1919 by The Frank A. Munsey Company. This story was published serially in The All-Story Weekly beginning with the April 12, 1919 issue

"I was a woman—it was myself for whom my husband George and the Thing of Evil were fighting; my love had been the inspiration that had snatched my husband from the evil bond that had held him to the fiend"

He was splendid, leaning back in his chair, his light hair almost silver in the half light, his face finely chiseled, his eyes half shut in contemplation. Half carelessly he reached over and held my fingers. There was something like a silent message in the touch. I was startled. Finally he spoke.

"Roselle," he said simply.

I am sure that I cannot explain it. The very accent of the word! It is almost unbelievable that so much feeling can be put in a single intonation.

"Roselle!"

Was I frightened? I do not know. But I spoke calmly.

"What is it, George? What is it? Let me turn on the lights."

"No," he answered, "it is better as it is. I would have it so. You are beautiful. It is peaceful; it is the gloaming. I must tell you."

I had never heard him speak with such an accent; there was a tone of solicitude that was unusual. I pressed the hand that was over my fingers.

"You frighten me, George. What is it you would tell me? It must be—"

"No," he interrupted, "you must not be frightened. But I must tell you. Let me ask you, Roselle. Do you know me?"

"Know you? Why—"

"Understand me?"

"I do not know what you mean, George. Tell me."

He was silent for a moment.

"You know I am not like other men. There is a great secret about me. I am not like others."

"Of course not," I answered. "You are great, wonderful, splendid."

He smiled indulgently.

"Of course, Roselle, I am to you, because I am your husband."

I held his hand tightly. I am positive that a tremor passed through his body. A slight breath of air rustled the curtains into somber shadows. A fitful breeze fanned through the open window.

"And this secret, George," I asked. "What is it?"

"Listen," he said, "and I shall tell you.

"You have noted many times, have you not, that I am not like others? I am something different. I am a type of isolation."

"Yes, George," I answered, "I have noticed."

"And you have known me by many names—George Witherspoon, the Rebel Soul, and others. I have been called the King of Thieves, a prince and a baron. I have lived like a shadow, or, to use the contrary metaphor, like a gleam of sunshine.

"I have not lived as have others. Life to me was not the flitting out at birth into a given channel. I have held life and ruled it—I have been its master. I have laughed at the fate that has been so potent with others. Fate has been my plaything. Do you follow?"

"I think so."

"I have had the riches of all the earth, its surfeits and its pleasure, its largess and its luxury. I have shared its splendor, I have even tasted of its crime. I have been cruel and selfish. The millions I have squandered are not to be numbered.

"I have genius. There is nothing on earth that I may not do. I am the first man to have full control of his brain and actions. I am different. So much so that I am not human.

"I make no mistakes. I am alone. There are only two, in all the world, who can begin to understand me. Yourself and the Master. And I have drawn you into the shadow."

"The shadow?"

"Yes, the shadow. The great battle that must be fought. I shall battle for your life and mine; for our very souls. The Master will be our ally."

In an instant I sensed his meaning. The darkness opened and I was peering again into that library in the city of the north land—the calm, poised, handsome figure by the table, the statuette of Descartes, the books face open on the floor; the handsome face wreathed with derisive laughter, egging, taunting, with eyes sparkling with amusement. And another figure, grim and distorted, terrible with evil, raining out a storm of anathemas at his derision.

How often had I conjured that picture? How often had I hoped that he had thrown—even as he had tossed out that loathsome creature—all evil and wickedness out of his life.

My intrusion I had never mentioned. I had always felt, in a guilty sense, that I had been spying on the privacy of his life. I was certain that some day his love would come to me with its secret. And it was true. I made my confession.

"GEORGE," I said, "I know. You must pardon your Roselle. I was a witness that night of the whole scene in

the library. I had no thought of intruding, of spying, of listening where I was not wanted. I was merely coming to you, to be with you during the evening, to sew and dream beside you, to watch you as you studied. You know how I have always loved to be near you.

"And I ran into that. Oh, it was dreadful. That loathsome creature— he said, he said—oh, George, who is he?"

He held my hands as in a vise; his breath came deeply, his form was shaken with emotion. I understand that it was not fear, that it was love for my own frail body. Love to him was of more meaning than to any man on earth. It consumed him.

"You ask me who he is, Roselle? I cannot tell you. I do not know. But the words you heard him speak are the truth. I have sold my soul!"

It was terrible. To have such a confirmation. It could not be. I would not have it.

"No, no!" I exclaimed. "George, it is not true. It is impossible. I will not have it."

But he continued:

"Nevertheless it is the fact. I was taken to the top of the mountain. And I was not divine. I was shown the riches of all the earth and its fulness. I was but mortal. It was all mine for the taking, for such a little thing as a soul.

"I was full of life and action—but a boy. I had neither father nor mother. In my veins flowed the hot blood of adventure. Worlds, woman, song, glory, power, and adventure, genius beyond that of any living mortal were offered to me.

"And what was a soul? A mere flame that vanishes into the darkness, a flicker that goes out, unseen and forgotten. It was so distant. I was young and could live forever. What cared I for a soul that was weighed against all this pleasure? It was a wonderful bargain; I was human, I closed upon the spot."

"Then," I faltered—a great fear, almost terror, was clutching my throat—"then he is the devil? Oh, George, it cannot be. Surely—"

He took me in his arms and drew me to him. I was trembling. I could feel his hands fondling my hair and his hot breath against my forehead. He kissed me; it was like the pouring of his soul into that one caress.

"It hurts me," he said, "to tell you. Until I met you I was evil; the most evil one in all the world. I have stolen fortunes. I have taken a delight in toppling over the great and powerful. I have wantoned and wallowed in untold riches! I have had a heart of steel and no mercy. I have had a delight in the wicked; I hated truth and virtue. I contaminated all with which I came into contact.

"I am not human. I have been warped, twisted, and thrown into infinity. I have come out an angel—an angel of evil.

"It was our compact. For my soul I was to have all this. But I have made no compact with the devil. Of that you may be sure. No, Roselle, he is not the devil."

That was even worse. He must be even more evil. He could not be a man. What use would one man have for the soul of another?

"Then," I said, "you do not know who this terrible one may be?"

"I know nothing. He is terrible, as you say. He is neither sex no gender. He is evil—abstract. But you must not think him supernatural. He is not. That much I know. It is a combination of laws and forces. I am merely the product of an unknown law, a miracle, an unguessed concept.

"And that is the strangest part of all. I who have everything else am refused this one thing. In this I am not one whit wiser than a man. I know naught of the law that governs my existence. I only know that I am not man—that is as we conceive man. Neither am I spirit. I know not what I am."

Was there ever such a confession? Was ever a girl wedded to such a husband? He was great, wonderful, magnetic. He was not an automaton. He was flesh and blood and life and passion. He was as human as myself. And yet by his own words he was something else. What was he?

I ran my hand over his splendid features; I could feel the warmth of life blood, the pulse of his heart-beats, his moist breath flushed against my fingers. He could love. He must be human. I dwelt over each perfect detail, tenderly stroking each curve and muscle.

In the darkness I could sense the eyes that glowed with passion; eyes somber, blue, smoldering, yet clear with life and genius. No man ever loved as he. It was his all—it was holy.

It swept and consumed me like a flame. I could understand what it was for a maiden to be loved by an angel. Ah!

That was the answer. If he were not a man he must be an angel. It seemed impossible, but it must be so. I was not versed in mystics; but what other thing could he be? He performed miracles; he was controlled by no human power nor action. Why was it impossible? His love, his genius, his beauty—everything proclaimed it.

CHAPTER XXX

THE COMPACT OF EVIL

"GEORGE," I said, "you are—you have not sold your soul; do not say it—you are an angel."

He gripped me convulsively and went into laughter, the musical, clear, bell-like mirth that was always his. When he laughed there was a melody that was pervading. I cuddled in his arms. I was a frail, foolish flower compared to his spirit.

"Spoken," he said, "like a true love. I did speak but figuratively. I am not an angel. I am not holy. An angel is eternal. I can die."

I placed my hand over his mouth.

"Do not say it," I said.

Tenderly he drew my hand away.

"You must hear me, Roselle. Come, I am getting nowhere. I must tell you. The Master will be here shortly.

"If I was to be an angel, little one, I was to be one of destruction. We sealed the compact. I was young and foolish. I was to have everything—he was to have my soul. We both were satisfied. Our bargain was specific.

"But it chanced, in this one case, that the devil overstepped his wisdom. I was to have everything; not a thing excluded. As long as I followed the paths of evil I was wrought unto his purpose. He had thrown me into the infinite and brought me back even as powerful as himself.

"Yes, more powerful, for I am fearless, and in me there is still some speck of virtue. It was this that was the undoing of our pact. It drove us into mortal combat. Now he fears me and would slay me. He dares not be open; he cringes with his hatred. I defy him with my laughter. One of us must slay the other. And it was you who did it."

"I! I did it!"

"Yes, you, Roselle. It was your love. I was to have everything, the earth and all its fulness. When I was thrown into the infinite I was tempered a millionfold. No man can love a noble woman and still be evil. My love is as a thousand; it is the fact of my creation. I cannot help it. I had still a spark of virtue. You have fanned it into a conflagration.

"And therein comes the conflict.

"The thing of evil is against me. He was sworn to man's destruction. I was to be his instrument. I was to ride with the whirlwind. All things were moving nicely—until I found you.

"The inevitable happened. I loved you. My love engulfed me; I who was being tossed in the whirlpool found suddenly a thing to live for. With it came virtue. Your little hands have plucked me out of the tides of evil.

"My status has been broken. I who am the Rebel Soul am now a rebel against both God and the devil. I am alone. I am brilliant; have genius and fear nothing For myself I care nothing. But I must look after you. That is why I have called the Master."

"But George," I interrupted, "you must not talk so. God is not against you. You are good now, instead of evil. There can be no middle course. God is always with you."

He looked at me queerly.

"With me, Roselle? God? That is impossible. It cannot be. You must remember that I am George Witherspoon. And I do not care. I am neither man nor spirit. I am an anomaly. In the credence of ordinary mankind I am impossible. I cannot come under religion; I am outside of all your rules. I am alone."

"No, no, George; not alone!"

He thought a moment.

"No, not alone. I will amend that. I have you and the Master."

"Myself and the Master?" I said. "I can understand myself. I am your wife. What has the Master?"

"That is what I must tell you," he answered. "I am not exactly alone. There is one who, I think, may understand me. Certainly he is different from the others. He is wisdom, he is thought, he is greater than his fellows. He is receptive, he has imagination. I have known him since my boyhood. I have been his pupil; he is the only one who has ever been able to inspire my admiration.

"The Master is good; he has not one spot of evil; he is old and has perfect poise. Even in my youth, when I was a flame of evil, I had reverence for his greatness. There is a possibility that he may understand me.

"Certainly I do not understand myself. Therein I am as weak as any mortal. I am not boasting. I can do magic. I can overstep all rules of thinking. I transcend all time and distance; but I cannot interpret the simple law of my causation.

"I am at conflict with a devil. I am fearless. Nevertheless wisdom is still the better part of valor. So I have called the Master. It may be that in time not distant you will need him. Things may happen.

"He who is good in all things will not hesitate to give you the benefit of his learning. Obey him implicitly. And remember—I cannot be defeated. I shall triumph even over the devil. Yes, even if I have to follow him into hell."

It was terrible to hear him talk so. But I was under the glow of his genius. It was impossible to be near him without being stirred to the depths by the magnetism of his personality. Although I was fearful, and had a feminine dread, I had a thrilling eagerness for the conflict that was impending.

I believed him. It was stupendous—it was heroic. He was not only against all mankind, but against all existence.

Alone, great, beautiful, fearless! My husband!

For my sake, and because of the emotions I had aroused, he was a rebel, even against that which had made him the Rebel Soul. He was greater than the St. George who went forth to slay the dragon. He was without hope of salvation, he cared not, he was standing alone against the evils of all darkness. He asked no succor, he was defiant, he would conquer alone by his will and genius.

Just then a servant came in with a card that he presented to my husband.

"The Master! Ah! Show him in at once. Roselle, you shall see the old friend of our childhood. He has a little surprise for you. He will ask it, or it will come as an inspiration."

IT WAS the Master. In the shadow, owing to the dark robe that I knew he must be wearing, I could not more than half discern him. But I could sense his presence; the mellowness and peace that proclaims the advent of a kindly presence. George turned on the lights and there he was—the good old Master.

He was smiling. The same old man of serenity and kindness that we had ever known him. He did not appear older; he had reached that stage of age and wisdom when years have lost their withering power. As of old, he was robed in solid black, which was accentuated by the white cuffs that protruded slightly from the sleeves above his finely tapered hands and fingers.

There was always something about the Master that spoke perfection; even in his years something of the lithesomeness of the panther, ease, elegance, and delicacy. In his youth he must have been splendid; he who in his age had such poise and bearing. There was nothing infirm about him; but a grace and delicacy of movement which even a youth might envy.

In all respects he was the old Master of our childhood—his beard the same white silver, his eyes the same soft kindness, mellow with good will and understanding and dancing with the limpid shimmer that betold his wisdom.

He looked to the one and to the other. Surprise and congratulation.

"Well, well," was his cheery greeting. I could not forbear embracing him, and of weakening into a little sob. Like an old grandfather he patted the hair of my head. I heard him mutter: "Roselle." I think that even he was a little softened.

George found him a chair. They shook hands, and I could not but mark the keenness and intenseness with which each regarded the other. It was not a mere look, but an interpretation, as if each was peering into the soul of the other. They stood thus with their hands clasped, George frank and smiling. I noticed that the old man's eyes grew brighter, an incredulous but for all that delighted intuition lighting them into soft glowing.

"George!" he exclaimed, pressing the hand that he held. "George, my boy. Is it true?"

"It is true," said my husband.

What he meant by that I do not know. But it pleased the Master. His smile grew broader. He pressed George's hand with deep emotion.

"At last, my boy, at last! I was always sure that you would come back to the Master. Such is a woman. I was certain of Roselle. You would do anything for her?"

"Anything in the world, my Master."

The Master sat down. He was so like a good grandfather. He gave a cursory, fleeting look about the apartment, as if

interpreting us by our surroundings. I could not but smile; it was very good to see him; to have him with us.

George came over and sat on the arm of my chair, with one foot dangling and one arm behind me.

It seemed to please the Master, as if he was beholding just the one thing that he had come for. The twinkle in his eyes had just a suggestion of the mischievous.

"What is a woman?" he asked.

George laughed. The imputation was no doubt myself, and the hold I had upon him.

"You have guessed it," he answered. "You foretold; it has happened exactly as you predicted."

"Just so," smiled the Master. "Roselle, you are to be commended. You found the old man's advice worthy?"

I did not answer at once, but the slight pressure that I gave to George's hand, and the one I received in return, was a silent attestation that we both understood him.

"It was worthy, Master. I have never doubted. It has had its reward," I said at last.

"It is good," he said, "to see you and to find you so." Then with a little severity in his tone: "You are both rebels."

THE intonation of the last remark was of that slight degree that expresses mild reproval. I had done no wrong that I was aware of.

"Am I a rebel, Master? You speak as if I had done ill. Was it wrong that I love George Witherspoon?"

"I am afraid, Roselle," he said, "that your love has made you a bit selfish. You are both very wicked. You have fortified yourselves by isolation. You have fled away from all others to be by yourselves.

"I can understand George here; he was forsworn on the day he attained manhood, he was ever an insurgent and a rebel; he ran away from his Master—but I cannot understand Roselle. What has become of the little girl who was ever so pretty and confiding, who was so soft-hearted, and who was ever so solicitous of her loved ones?"

The reflection of his voice had shifted almost into scolding. It was not harsh; but of the mild sting of disappointment. I could not understand it. It pleased him that we were happy. I had done nothing that could merit censure. Unless, indeed, it was to love my husband; and that plainly had his approbation. I could but wonder.

"I do not understand you," I answered. "What is it, Master? What have I done?"

He smiled calmly, and looked, not at me, but at my husband. I fancied a note of recognition. I glanced inquiringly up at George, then at the old man before me.

"Please, please tell me," I said. "What have I done? What loved ones?"

At the same time that I realized that there was something strange about the interrogation, I became suddenly aware of a shadow, of an emptiness, of something missing out of my life. The words of the Master stirred dim sovereign memories, vague, calling, but forgotten. It was something that I must regain. I tried to remember. The old man helped me.

"Roselle," he said kindly, "you have not written. Have you forgotten Clara, Walter, and the children?"

So that was it! That was the part of my life that had been blotted out. I had forgotten. Why was it? The very best things of my girlhood had been washed away. The sound of your names was an open sesame to my recollections. On the instant the old life walked before the screen of my memory. I could see you, Walter and Clara, the children, the home among the madronas, the quaintness and beauty of our little city.

The children playing beneath the full sweet blossoms of the big magnolia. A curtain had been snatched away. The old home, the scent of the far Pacific; the soft wind from the bay, the blue, limpid sheen of water in the distance.

I could hear the whistle of the familiar local; the birds chattering their insistent melody in the trees; the unrestrained glee of childish laughter. My heart yearned with sudden longing, to see and be with that which I had so long forgotten.

For a moment I was silent with the excitement of my recollections. It was incomprehensible. And I had forgotten! The dearest memories of all my lifetime! Though I was accustomed to the impossible, there was no explaining this ungrateful lapse of memory. All my loved ones! It had been years since I had seen them. And I had forgotten!

I must have risen; George was speaking, and he caught me gently by the arm.

"Sit down, Roselle," he said, "It was I

not you. You are blameless. It was I who erased the past from your memory. You shall write to them in the morning. It is the surprise that the Master was to bring you. You must write to Clara and to Walter."

"Why did you do this?" I heard the Master asking. I heard them, although my thoughts were miles away. My present surroundings and the shiftings of my memory were woven together into a blurred distinctness. "Why did you do this?"

George laughed shortly.

"Why? I presume you know. I was the Rebel Soul. And I loved her. Why was I to share her love with another? What cared I for her recollections? It was my nature to take that which I desired. I hated the ones from whom I had taken her. She was mine; I kept her for myself."

"And it is different now?"

"Yes, Master, it is different now. I—"

But he went no further. He stopped as if he could give no fuller words; they were full of meaning, as if a new man had spoken. It pleased the old man. I remember the gratitude in his benediction.

"Amen," said the Master.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE VENGEANCE OF EVIL

ALL this occurred two days ago. Since then we have returned to Xanadu. I am very happy. I have been writing steadily on this letter, which is not a letter at all, but a book. It is not my fault that there is so much to relate.

There are other things that I might tell, but I have only touched on what is the most important. It is so uncertain that I doubt whether you will understand me. And no wonder.

When I glance back over what I have written I cannot but feel that every occurrence, however trivial, is of the abnormal. According to all rules and conduct, such a tale could not be true. We are anomalies, myself and my husband, we are out of the laws and fashions, we are impossible. Yet we are true, living and potential.

It is so much like a tale that I sometimes find myself doubting my own fancy. It is much like a dream; it is indeed the land of nowhere. When I look back on the realities that once existed, the prosaic life of my girlhood, and contrast it with the illusive, filmy witchery of the present, it seems to me that I am like one on a beautiful height gazing down on the prosaic, mist-covered expanse of forsaken valley.

Below us are the streaks and shadows, the level life of the common; about us are the heights and colors, beauty, grandeur, ruggedness and adventure. We are in the clouds, nearer to infinity, closer to the sunshine. Though we live near mankind and may see him, though we may rub elbows with him by day, we are for all that aloof in the distance.

When I was a girl I was forever delving into some book of the early writers; some tale of early discoverers, buffeting on through the storms of unknown waters, sailing up misty channels, through newfound gates, and past strange headlands, nosing into the limpid bays and rivers, poking about for the golden cities and the people of the sun.

No girl ever perused with such a thrill for adventure. It was a time of enchantment, of lure and call, of brave men and heroes; of fair women. For hours I would seclude myself in my room, and, while the curtains of the past were lifted, spring full swing with my imagination into the age of heroes.

Then would come the awakening. I would look out of the window up the hot paved street and watch the lazy grocery boy making his languid deliveries, the pedestrians swinging along the sidewalk, a butcher wagon twisting around a corner or an automobile bearing a fat and placid drummer down the highway. The air would be hot and stifling; a shimmer of heat danced above the pavement. It was prosaic. it was all a sameness.

My heart would swell with impotent rebellion. To be condemned to such an age! To live like a mere insect in this age of money! Money, money, money; that is all we cared for; that is all we thought of. There were no more heroes. There were no more lands of great adventure; no misty continents beckoning from afar, no uncharted channels, no northwest passages awaiting in solitude for the great discoverer, no tiny barks on the storm-tossed ocean.

It was the age of barter, of commerce, and civilization. Balls and theaters were our amusement, or a motor trip up into

the mountains. The girls did not love their men for their bravery and their heroism, but for their looks and wealth. Those who married settled down to a life of flat, even years to raise more children to make more money. The blood had run out of humanity and run golden.

Where were our heroes?

My mind was filled with the heroes of romance. I wanted red-blooded men, full of sacrifice; strong, manly, who were willing to stand against the world for an attainment, pulsing, full throbbing, active. I cared not for market heroes. I wanted a man and a fighter.

It was that that drew me to George Witherspoon. I had heard his story. He was alone. All men feared him. He was great, wonderful, and a criminal. At least that is what they called him. Society had set its standard; the police had measured him by it and had found him lacking.

Either that, or he was above our society and standards. He had laughed at their restrictions and had defied them; he was great enough to take measure of his greatness, he was brave enough to defy convention. He was himself; he was alone.

What a sequel! I had longed for adventure. I am sure no girl has ever before lived such a life as I have. I have been borne to the land of nowhere; to the home of the sunshine, to the realm where the impossible may ever happen. Such is my husband!

I am happy. After all that has occurred, the warning, the mystery, the foreboding, it does seem meet that I be depressed and worried. But I am not. And after all, why should I be? Have I not asked for the sunshine? Has not my husband promised? It is impossible that I even think in sadness. I am attuned to music, the melody that is the spirit of George Witherspoon. He pervades me like an exultation.

And now in closing.

You know that I am happy. I am sure that you will rejoice at hearing from the one who was with you so much of her girlhood.

You have no doubt been always fearful, dreading what might have fallen. I can understand your forebodings and what you may have thought of my husband.

Oh, Walter! Do not harbor any thoughts of evil. Remember him as he was in your childhood—beautiful, wonderful, good. He is mystery; but he is not evil. Though I know not what he is, he is at least my husband. He is good, kind, gentle. Whatever may happen our love can have no wither.

And now, good-by. Love to all and the little ones. Kisses all round. Your Roselle.

P. S.—It was but yesterday that I finished your letter. I was so happy. It did seem that I was living in the sunshine. I am not happy now.

It is hard for me to think clearly after what has happened. But I must write; I must tell you.

It is that terrible thing of evil. My husband! I am sure it is the thing of evil. Oh, why can it not allow me to have my husband? What have I done?

But I must tell you. And I must hurry, because I am afraid.

IT WAS last night. I had just finished your letter. I was so happy. My thoughts were back with you and the little ones, and the white magnolias, and the scintillations of the ocean sunset. I could see the waters. I could almost see myself standing by you, peering into the distance at a steamer just tipping the horizon, creeping in from far-off China.

My heart was with you. It does seem strange that such a climax of my happiness should be the moment of my disaster. I had arisen mechanically from my desk and stepped over to the window.

What I saw was not the waters, but the green lawn of the park, and the shadetrees, and behind them the beautifully tinted sky of our own French sunset. Half absently I noticed some one walking beneath the trees in the distance. Then again, and this time I saw my husband.

He was coming up the driveway; he was afoot and walking hurriedly; he was bareheaded. At the moment it struck me as unusual. There was something in his bearing, in his gait, that did not seem as it should be. It is strange that I should have noticed it from such a distance.

His hat was clutched tightly in one hand. As he came closer I could see that he was breathing heavily, his mouth was open, he must have been running. I could not understand it. There was that in his steps that told of evil. It must be something terrible indeed when it could so stir George Witherspoon.

As he approached the mansion he broke into a run. Below I could hear the patter of his feet as he rushed up the marble steps. A door swung open. I could hear him on the stairs.

I turned to greet him; to be ready for his smile. It was the one great hour of the day that I longed for. The door swung open, and he was standing there before me. I heard his voice.

"Roselle."

Never shall I forget that moment.

Oh, Walter! He was standing there, his arms outstretched. He was beautiful. His face was clear-cut and ennobled with passion and devotion. He was sacrifice and yearning. But there was something else. I saw it and I screamed. I ran over to him. His arms closed about me. I could see it. He was blind!

He held me tightly. I could feel his heart beating; the pulse was even. His fingers ran over my features. He kissed me.

"There, there," he said, "I have found you."

He was not frightened. There was that in his voice of a great calmness.

"Oh, George!" I exclaimed, "what has happened? What is it? You are blind! You have been stricken."

He laughed.

It was strange and unnatural that he should be mirthful. It rang with a mockery that was defiance. His arm came down about my waist.

"It is nothing, Roselle. I am blind, but it is nothing. The devil has merely lost his head. I am not the only one who is wallowing in the darkness.

"Besides, I have you. You are everything; I can feel you, I can hear you breathing. It is the first blow of the conflict. He cannot win. I am his Master."

He laughed again. Never have I heard such laughter. It was more like gloating, as though he were watching some secret spectacle, some quick stroke of his genius.

"Let us sit down, Roselle, that we may talk while still we may. There, now—let me have your hand."

He took it and turned my wedding ring thoughtfully about my finger. I was frightened, dismayed, at this sudden disaster; I sensed immediately what had happened. The first blow had fallen; the terrible one had struck.

What had been the retaliation? I knew my husband; that his wrath would be even more terrible than the other's venom. The two were in conflict. Only one could triumph. Again I heard his laughter.

"Roselle," he said, "I have called the Master. It has come at last. I am blind. How long I am to remain so I cannot tell. That is for my devil. In his narrowness and evil he thought that I loved only your beauty. It is the heart of evil that it cannot know virtue. He has overreached himself; in the superlative moment he has lost his head, which is the way of evil."

Again he laughed.

"Oh!" I exclaimed. "George, why do you laugh? Why do you laugh? It is terrible. I—"

He clutched me.

"Listen, Roselle," he said, "I have been stricken. You shall see why I laugh. You shall see the other. I struck back. I, too, can wield the fire. We shall see who is the Master. I cannot be conquered. You shall see it. See!"

At the word the room went to darkness. I was frightened, and clung to him, trembling.

"On the side wall, Roselle," he whispered; "on the side wall. See it?"

Then I beheld it.

IT WAS as a screen laid before the shadows, a perfect vision shot into the distance, to a place I knew not of; a room stricken and dirty—a dark room. On the floor were books and papers, on the walls shelves of books reaching to the ceiling.

It was a room of shadows, only half lit by the electric globe that glowed in the corner. The carpet was of dark and fantastic pattern; the windows were high and the light was slanting. In another corner was a bed with tumbled blankets. I noticed that they moved; that they were heaved and tossing. At first I could not distinguish more, the light was so dim and musty, and the place so filled with shadow.

But just then a streak of light streamed through the window and filtered through the shadow, falling slantwise. Never shall I forget what it lighted. A form upon the bed, in convulsion, terrible, ghostly. The mouth was open, the eyes were bulging, the tongue was black and swollen, its whole body was writhing. Never shall I forget that face! The eyes blinked at me like twin dots of centered hatred. It was the thing of evil!

I shut my eyes in horror. When I opened them it was springing about the room in the agony of convulsion. It was like a rat. It was caged; terrible and impotent. Its arms were about its stomach. It would roll and tumble, pant and blink its hatred. Never was a thing more wretched nor in greater agony. And yet never was a thing that deserved less pity.

"Blind, blind," George was saying; "and I wonder just how long?"

I shut my eyes to exclude the horror that I was beholding. When I opened them the scene had vanished.

"Oh," I exclaimed, "it is terrible; it is unnatural; it is unholy!"

He pressed my hand as he answered:

"I was taken to the mountain, Roselle. The devil and I both were foolish; we must make payment of our folly. It is a question of endurance, a contest for the rule of darkness. You see that I am powerful. I have been stricken; but I have not been stricken singly.

"It is you for whom we are fighting. It is a question whether I may have the love of a noble woman or whether I am to be the slave of wickedness forever. Our compact was made upon the mountain; I was to have the earth and its fulness. I shall have it. I shall triumph —a compact is binding even to the devil. I am unconquerable; the virtue you have instilled shall override all this evil."

It was good to hear him say so; but it was a portent. The struggle was but beginning; these two beings, so far removed from others, were in mortal conflict. I shuddered with dread for what might be impending; I longed for the Master.

I would not leave my husband; he was blind, and it was urgent that he receive my ministrations. I knew not what might happen; my thoughts were tumultuous. In my dread and horror I could not think clearly; I was frail and alone between two mighty forces. It was away from reason; they were fighting with unknown weapons; they were impossible; yet real, tangible, potent.

I was the woman—it was myself for whom they were fighting; my love had been the inspiration that had snatched George away from evil. These two beings who were so like spirits were testing out their souls by a contest of bodily endurance. It was terrible and unearthly; and I shuddered to think of what it might come to. "Love, love," had said the Master; "you will be triumphant." Did he foresee such a struggle? And, if he did, might it not be that he would help me?

I spoke to my husband.

"Did you say that you have sent for the Master? Can he do anything? Surely, with all his wisdom, he can throw the balance into your favor. You know his maxim."

He drew my hand over into his lap and stroked it; although his eyes were sightless, there was a passion and beauty in his face, an expression that betold his greatness.

"Roselle," he said, "I have sent for the Master. You are not afraid, are you?"

It was another instance of his power. I don't know why, but for the moment I was calm and settled.

"No," I answered, "I am not. I was but now that you have spoken I feel brave and courageous. You pervade my spirit. How do you do it?"

He smiled.

"I am glad," he returned. "It will do for the present; but there will come a time, very shortly, when you must be calm of your own volition. Then you must remember that you love me. Think of nothing else. Remember that you are fighting to keep a soul out of darkness. Do not leave my body."

"Your body! You will not die!"

"No, no, little one. It will not be death; but very nearly so. I must tell you. Let no one have my body. I shall not be dead, though death may be stamped on my features. Life is only animation; it will be suspended."

At the moment his hand grew clammy cold, a tremor ran through his body, a shudder, as if something was being pulled asunder; his form became limp and collapsed; in spite of my frantic efforts he lurched forward and fell inert, dragging me with him. His lips alone were moving; like injunctions from another world I heard his words, faint and indistinct: "Roselle — love — Master — don't surrender."

That was last night.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE END OF THE LETTER

AS SOON as I could calm myself I called a servant. Together we placed him on a bed. I smoothed the pillows and laid him back upon them. He was natural in his beauty, like one sleeping;

his lips were wreathed with a pleased expression.

I stroked the fine locks of yellow hair away from his forehead, twisting it back between my fingers. As I drew them away the hair sprang into curls and ringlets. I touched his cheek—it was cold. The heat of life was leaving quickly. He was not breathing.

Nevertheless I told the servant that he was in no danger. I did not wish for a doctor. He had given me warning, and his words filled me with courage. I assured myself that he was merely sleeping. I would remain with him until the coming of the Master. It was his request.

Yet I will confess that when I was alone and kneeling by the bed and gazing at his features my heart was full of anguish. He was mine, mine; great and beautiful, as splendid as a god; he was like no man living; he was as majestic and imposing as the great dead Alexander. I picked up his hand and caressed it and wet it with my tears. For me he was braving all these perils. He would not surrender.

And what was I that I should awaken all this sacrifice and devotion? I was tender and delicate, a wee little body that might be crushed like an egg-shell! There were many others just as beautiful; thousands with far greater beauty. What was I that I should be so chosen; to be the wife of such a husband; to be wedded to infinity; to be mated with a being like this!

He was mystery. My love had brought him back to virtue. I, who was such a little thing had been a potent force in his salvation. His love had never shown any spotting. To me he had never been harsh for a single moment. The light I have ever known in his eyes was the love-light; it was inspiration like light from heaven, the soothing soft glow of genius and devotion.

How long I remained kneeling there I do not know. My mind was full of fancies and conjectures—the struggle of my loved one, the power that was against him, the evil—and the thing of evil.

The thought wrought upon me—filled me with terror. I pressed the limp hand, kissed it, and wept over it. It seemed that as I gazed into his face, so set and beautiful, that he could understand me; there was a calmness and repose about it of one who had attained victory. Then I prayed.

Prayed? It was such a prayer as I had never breathed since my childhood. I prayed to our Redeemer; to the one who, thousands of years before, had also been taken upon the mountain. I prayed for forgiveness, for strength, for my husband. He alone knew the battle; He who had fought it to a triumph could understand me. There upon the floor, kneeling by the bed, I stood between the Redeemer and my husband.

I stepped over to the window. Through the curtains I could look up into the wonderful night-sky of early summer. A million stars were gleaming, flickering like the lights of angels, flitting like the lamps of heaven, tiny messengers from the far-off distance.

In the soft breeze that was blowing, in the whispering of the trees, there was a strange concordance. There was in the quietness a peace that would be forever. It was akin to music, a rhythmic enchantment of swinging cadence. It caught me! I clutched the sills as I listened. It was music, strange, weird, entrancing, like the melody of the worlds, a symphony out of the distance.

It died away. I don't know what it really was, but I am sure I heard it. Or perhaps it was just my fancy; or it may have been that for the moment I was lifted up and tensioned so that I could commune with the higher forces. It may have been my prayer.

I returned to the bedside. It was close to midnight. In spite of my prayers and courage I was beginning to feel qualmish. The room was still and lifeless except for the soft rustling of the hangings. Once a paper caught by the breeze through the window blew across the carpet; the noise of its crinkling flight startled me.

I felt myself praying for the Master. It was getting close to the time and hour when anything might happen. My mind was seething—I was not superstitious, but I had seen so much that I could doubt nothing. The training of my childhood had implanted in me an awe for the wee hours of the early morning. Besides, the room was so quiet; I was alone, and—I thought of the scene I had beheld upon the side wall. Ever it comes back to that—and my husband. I must do something.

So you see why I am writing this postscript. I am alone, waiting for the Master. My husband is upon the bed in a death sleep. I am fearful—almost trem-

bling. As the hours have passed I have felt my courage stealing from me. I am afraid.

George is here, helpless and defenseless. Where is the Master? What can I do, who am so little? Every moment that I write I can feel something stealing toward me—my mind is growing weaker and my fear increasing. I don't know why it should be. Let me see. I shall be brave, strong and courageous. Love—I write it that I may see it. I don't know, as I shall write much more until I have seen it.

What am I saying? Something—something. Oh, Walter, there is something; I don't understand it. It was terrible! I am afraid! If the Master does not come, something surely will happen.

Oh—

THAT was all. The remarkable postscript came to a sudden ending. Just when we were all unstrung, unnerved, and wrought to a height of feeling came the abrupt conclusion.

It was now late in the evening. We had not stopped for dinner; we had long since turned on the lights to assist our reading. In the shadow I could see Clara. Her face was twitching, in a tightly clenched fist the last sheet of paper. My throat was parched. I dreaded the import of the ending.

It was not natural. Something had happened. After all our happiness and hope of the past few hours was to come this shock and disappointment. The sudden stop, the abrupt break in the sentence proclaimed more plainly than words what may have happened. I felt suddenly cold and deadened; I arose unsteadily and stepped over to my wife.

Her eyes were dim and misty, her breast heaving; with one hand she was sorting the leaves of the letter, placing on top of them all the envelope that had enclosed them. As she did so I noticed in one corner a sentence in a handwriting that was familiar. I picked it up and read:

Mailed by the Master

I must confess that the notation of the Master was like a ray of sunshine. Whatever had occurred, at least the old man had arrived. Somehow, throughout all this mystery, he seemed destined to appear at the crucial moment. Whether it was his wisdom, I cannot say, but he was ever on hand at the right time. George had summoned and he had responded; but had he arrived in time? That now was the whole question.

I called it to Clara's attention. It was our one great ray of hope, and you may be sure that we searched over every sheaf and page for the slightest further message. But we found not one more word; just that, the one sentence, "Mailed by the Master." And there was so much to it that we might interpret by implication, so many ways of construing it—success, triumph, or disaster.

But, however equivocal the message, there was one thing certain—the Master had arrived. That in itself was worth whole reams of promises. He had not tarried, and the mere fact of his presence was proof that all would be done that could be done.

I could understand what the strength of their united personalities would be against this evil. An anlysis of what Roselle had written increased the conviction. Everything had come to a quick and sudden turning. George Witherspoon had turned to virtue. He was the George Witherspoon of old, great and fearless—it was a proper climax to his genius.

What a life! To be born a rebel, to be indomitable, to know no lord nor master! How proper it was that he be called the Rebel Soul! No matter what he did he was still in rebellion.

But Clara needed reassurance; the mystery, the unexpectedness, the horror of the whole affair had unnerved her. She loved Roselle, and she had antipathy for the other. To her George had never been other than a wicked scapegrace, splendid, to be sure, and of great personality; but for all that, essentially wicked. The letter we had received, with its tragic ending, was about all that she could bear.

The whole thing was so impossible and so fraught with shadow; and we were in the twentieth century. Was it possible that there were forces which we, with all our science, had not conceived of? It must be so. I could not accept it as supernatural.

Some irresponsible genius for evil was employing some unknown power for his own wicked aggrandizement, and George Witherspoon was his instrument. How glad I was that Witherspoon was a rebel, and the Master was on the ground to help him.

It was like the "Sleeping Beauty" tale beloved of childhood, only here were two asleep—a princess and a real prince, with an old man to the rescue

But Clara was not the one to go into reason, she was thinking of Roselle, and, womanlike, while under the stress of emotion, could only see the worst. I reassured her, and gradually quieted her fears.

"If it were as bad as that," I told her, "the Master would have written. He loves Roselle as much as we do, and he loves us, also. He would not fail us in an emergency, he merely had not time, it was rather an abrupt ending; you telephoned that she was happy."

"I know I did," she answered. "But, Walter, it was so much like a book. I had read only the first few pages, I was so glad. I never dreamed—it is so mysterious, so impossible. Were it not for the handwriting I would not believe it Roselle at all; it is too much like imagination. Why must we and ours be picked out for these manifestations of the impossible?"

"Not impossible, Clara," I amended, "or there would be no manifestations."

"I know," she answered. "Why we?"

I smiled at that, because really I could not answer it. I could only say:

"I suppose there must be some one."

We had dinner, a late one, eating perfunctorily, merely to satisfy our bodies. But it did us a world of good. There is nothing that conduces to optimism like a good full stomach; it is wonderful how our feelings fluctuate with our appetites. We returned to the letter.

It was deep in the morning when we ceased our reading, and hours later before we ended our discussion. We analyzed thoroughly and endeavored to find coherence, but it was impossible. It was indeed a message out of nowhere, all upside down and out of reason, but we were certain of its truth, we had faith in the Master.

Incredible as it may seem we were inspired with courage and a trust in the future. I don't know why, but after that first break of disaster we breathed more freely. Things were coming to a climax. We felt, somehow, that we were to have Roselle, and, who can tell, perhaps George Witherspoon.

When I retired to my room I stepped over to the window. I could not help thinking of some of the last words Ro-

selle had written. Here, too, the stars were gleaming, the same stars that she had looked on. Here, too, the trees were rustling, a permeating peace spread out forever. It was like reading into a soul to gaze up into the night's great distance, there was a pulse to earth that beat to music, a great throbbing rhythmic cadence that swung into a melody that was earth and heaven.

Roselle and George Witherspoon! Where were they? Let the good God protect them!

Then I went to bed, and I dreamed for the thousandth time of George Witherspoon—the George Witherspoon of my childhood.

CHAPTER XXXIII

AT THE HOUSE OF THE SEVENS

FROM that day on, as you may surmise, we watched the mails very closely. We were unstrung and unnerved by waiting; it seemed that word must come very shortly; we both of us thought, with the promptings of our hearts, that more news would soon be forthcoming. We cheered ourselves with the anticipation that it would be of the kind that we could welcome.

But none came. The days drew into summer, and then again into autumn, and as each day receded our hopes grew dimmer. From the very first the whole case had been a fluctuation of excitement. First would come a storm and a very tempest of mystery and excitement, and then would come reaction; the whole thing would go to the doldroms and there would be no stir whatever.

Months went by, one after another. Not a word. With our anxiety and concern we were tensioned almost to the breaking-point. Whenever I came home in the evening Clara would be waiting.

"Not a word?" she would ask.

"Not a word," would be my answer.

It was hard to say it, but there was nothing else to tell her. Of course I endeavored to cheer her, and did my best to hold up her spirit. But the load was heavy. I noticed with great solicitude the look of sadness that was growing into her features. And she had been beautiful. The little wrinkles were coming about her eyes and her lips had a way of drooping; there was a hopeless yearning about her whole expression. Not even the children cheered her—her thoughts were ever on Roselle and her danger.

As the time wore on I also went more to worry; I spent whole hours at the bank in brooding thought. I began to neglect my business. It was difficult now to attend to details. Everything that I could I left to my assistants. I had but one thought and object—Roselle.

Until now I had no idea that one could so focus his thinking. Whatever I did and wherever I went I could derive no pleasure. I was growing old with worry.

At last I could stand it no longer. I journeyed over to the city and threaded through the streets until I came to the House of the Sevens. It was the same as it was when first I had found it; the great blank wall with not a single window and the black, heavy door in the center. The numbers on the door were slightly tarnished, arranged in the same diamond:

7
777
77777
7777777
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777
7

I recalled the day when I first had found it and the coincidence that had led me to the doorway. As I gazed on the blank wall it seemed emblematic. It was the home of the Master; it was the place of wisdom—and it had but a single entrance.

I caught the significance: "But a single road to learning." In that place I had once before found succor—it was there that I had first met the Master. Here was neverending research and study; here the doings of the earth were classified and shelved for reference; here was wisdom.

I turned the knob and entered. It was the same as ever. The old porter was seated on the same stool where first I had seen him. He was reading the same everlasting magazine; his clothes were the same faded black. He glanced up as I entered.

"Ah," he said, "this is a surprise, Mr. Warren!"

"Yes," I returned, "I do not come often, I am mostly a man of business. But even I have need at times of wisdom. Have you seen the Master?"

His face grew saddened.

"No, no," he answered. "No, the Master? It has been years since I have seen

him. He is gone. I do not know, even, if he will return; they do not tell me. Can you—"

"No, I cannot. It was that which brought me—I had hoped to find him. I suppose I must be satisfied with the others."

He opened the door that led out of the vestibule into the main part of the building. It was much the same. The same cone-shaped arrangement; the rooms serried along the sides, the same clatter of typewriters; the same clerks and students.

At the lower end of the cone was the great glass room of the Master. It was deserted. The chair was drawn up to the desk and the books arranged with order and precision. It was as it should be. There was no one who could take the place of the Master and his desk was sacred.

A man came forward, a Mr. Thompson; he was one of the Master's chief assistants; I had met him once before. He was tall, slender, black-eyed and slightly stooped; his hair had receded so that now he was not only figuratively but literally a highbrow. In his hands he held a roll of papers. I had noted that everybody in this strange place was forever holding papers, notes, clippings, odds and ends gathered from the ends of the earth. I had often thought that, however they might classify their strange philosophy, it was at least Baconian in its method; it was the most minute thing I ever saw in its detail.

"Ah, Mr. Warren! This is unexpected. Is there something I can do? You were looking for some one?"

TRUE to his code, his eyes had a wondrous softness; there was a mellowness about his voice, a fluent kindness. He led me to an office. It was a small one, with dark-toned fittings, though wonderfully well lighted; the desk and all the furniture was of walnut, dark and somber; a series of bookcases at one side of the room reached up to the ceiling. By my every-day habit of reading titles I made an approximation. The strangest assortment I had even seen—Hindu, Sanskrit, Chinese, Hebrew, and not a few German works, whose titles wandered all over the backs like a jumbled sentence.

I wondered whether it was possible that he had driven his brain through all this wisdom. In an adjoining room were a number of stenographers busily engaged with copy. He closed the door.

"You were asking for the Master. I presume you are interested in the case of George Witherspoon?"

I nodded. I wondered whether he knew more than I did. I had always been under the impression that the Master had retained this case for his own special direction.

He tapped on the desk with his fingers. I noted absently that they were long and tapered, the nails pink and transparent; on one finger was a ring monogrammed with a number seven.

"A strange case," was his comment. "The most remarkable on record. Have you heard from the Master?"

Now that was just the object of my visit. He was interrogating me on the very point on which I desired information. But I happened to remember the writing on Roselle's letter. This I told him. I did not go into detail, as I did not think there was time, nor did I know whether he would understand it.

At the recital his face brightened. He ceased thrumming with his fingers and listened to me with alert attention.

"It is good," he said when I had finished—"good to hear from the Master. Do you know that is the first word that we have received of him for two long years? We were growing worried. It was his orders, but we were just about at the limits of endurance. Our only guarantee of his safety was that his drafts had been cashed in Paris. We were becoming alarmed. Many things might happen. The Master is no longer young." I smiled rather vaguely. Somehow I could not picture the old man coming to violence.

"And Wilkins?" I asked.

"Wilkins is with the Master. They had taken this case under their own supervision. George Witherspoon was always to the Master a pet hobby. We collected detail, but the Master supervised it. It was always his contention that Witherspoon was—"

"He called him the Rebel Soul," I said.

"Yes, I know. A rebel. One of the secrets for which we are striving. A personality living and potential in whose body is the great essential, conscious and accessible."

"You mean?"

"That in George Witherspoon is the great secret of all philosophy. The why and the where of mankind."

"The Master told you this?" I asked.

"Not exactly. Except by intimation. I have only become convinced in the last three weeks of its importance. It was always looked upon until recently as the Master's own special case. Of course we all knew something about it, but we had never gone into detail. Even now I would not be in it but for the Master's absence."

"You were alarmed?"

"Exactly. He had sent us no word whatever. He is a very old man. If anything had happened we would continue the work where he had left it. We must find the Master. But, first, we must know all about the case on which he is working."

He stepped over to a filing cabinet and returned with a great sheaf of papers. These he spread out upon the table. Some were very old and thumb-worn; others new. He waved his white hand over them almost caressingly.

"Somewhere in there, and in George Witherspoon, is one of the greatest secrets of mankind."

It was not exactly news to me. But I knew George Witherspoon. If the truth is in fire, it was my experience that George Witherspoon was a conflagration. He was hard to get at, and he was impossible to handle.

This man, tall and slender, slightly stooped and ascetic, would go out and, with no apparent effort, draw from George his secret. It was the assurance of the scholar; the confidence of the cloister. Somehow I felt that George was in no danger.

"So you were going to the Master's assistance?" I asked.

"To France. Tomorrow."

But just then a door behind me opened and I heard a voice that made me leap from my seat with a joyous exclamation:

"I am sorry, Mr. Thompson. But you have been anticipated. I have returned to calm your worry."

It was the Master!

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE VICTORY

REALLY it was a coincidence—a remarkable circumstance that I should have chosen this day, of all others, to come to the House of the Sevens. But coincidence and the remarkable had been characteristic of the whole case.

The Master, after the usual congratulations, led me down into his own glass office. It was some time before the joy and excitement of his arrival had abated. There were many with whom to shake hands: some of the women wept, and I am afraid that a few of the girls could even have kissed him.

Through it all he smiled like a patriarch who had returned from a long and perilous journey. In this, even he was human—he was here like a great, happy father in the midst of his family. I could understand it; to them and to me, to all of us, he was a saint, not sullen and austere, but mild, mellow, gentle—what love and truth ever should be.

At last we were alone.

"And now, Walter," he said, "I suppose your first question is of Roselle."

Emphatically I nodded.

"Roselle is well."

"And George?"

"George Witherspoon is well, also."

"That is good news," I answered. "Since we received Roselle's letter Clara and I have been in a perfect fever of torment. You wrote nothing—merely, 'Mailed by the Master.' It told so little and left so much to implication."

"It was rather cryptic," he commented. "But at that time I assure you that I was very busy. When I arrived Roselle was unconscious. She must have left off writing and stolen over to her husband. She was lying on the bed beside him.

"Mine was certainly a weird arrival. Accustomed as I am to the unusual, it was much more than I expected. The château was like a place enchanted. Even the servants appeared affected; the whole place was silent. And in that room was the unconscious Roselle—lying appealingly across the breast of her husband.

"I called the servants—all of them—and plied them with questions. But they would not answer. They were blacks, most of them, regular old-fashioned Ethiopians. To my interrogations they only stared blankly. There was something that had come over them one and all that held them in abject terror.

"I tried to reason with them and to reassure them, but it was impossible. For that one room they had a horror as if it were the abode of the devil."

"What did you do?" I asked.

"The only thing that could be done. I returned to the apartment where the pair were sleeping. It was the strangest

thing of all my experience. It was much like the tale that I had read in my childhood—of 'The Sleeping Beauty.' Only here were two—a princess and a real prince, with an old man to the rescue. Had the creepers been all over the castle and the place full of cobwebs, I would have thought myself in the land of fable.

"They were the most beautiful things that I had ever looked on, Roselle and her husband; you have no idea, Walter, of the beauty that is really theirs. And in that moment they were supreme. There is no beauty like abandon. No peace like sleep.

"They had no pulse whatever, and they were not breathing, not even with a stethoscope could I detect the slightest tremor. I had been summoned by George to hurry with the speed of lightning. It did look as if I had come too late."

"But," I interrupted, "what did you do? Surely you must have thought them dead."

"No," he answered, "I did not. They were warm. Dead people are cold. Besides, when I was dealing with George Witherspoon I was ready to accept almost anything; there was nothing for me to do but to accept a long, unbroken vigil. I must not for a moment leave them. It was the first time since his boyhood that George had called me. I must not forsake him. And you know, Walter, how long I had waited for George to call me."

Somehow I had always considered the Master as almost more than human; at that moment I looked into his eyes; they were full of tears; how great must have been his love for this splendid and erratic youth, whom most men had so feared and hated. Whatever he was and whatever his faults the old man had never lost faith in his former pupil.

"It was all inexplicable," he continued after a bit, "until I discovered your letter, or, to be precise, the one that Roselle had written. A strange document, truly; it explained everything."

Explained! I could not but wonder. I had read it over until it was threadbare, and I could make out nothing. It was all enchantment; though I had once been trained to the law and was proficient in analysis, I could not, somehow, get down to the real core and center. I made the confession.

"It is simple," said the Master. "All we have to do is to take the truth just as Roselle has written it. George Witherspoon has been really taken to the mountain. By whom, we do not know. Perhaps by the devil.

"There are many in this century who do not believe in him, but we have no exact way except sophistry, for refutation. Who can tell? But certain it is that he has been taken to the mountain. At least figuratively. He has been tempted and he has fallen.

"Since the days of his boyhood he has been a mystery; there has always been something different about George Witherspoon. We knew not what it was. We studied and we watched him, but we could not understand him. He was a genius and had intuition more than human; he loved pleasure, was rollicking, good-natured, and was, I am afraid, not a little wicked. But none of us in our fancy had ever imagined that he had sold himself to a devil. It was impossible—"

"Yes," I interrupted, "and it is impossible. This thing of evil, whatever it is, is not the devil. I cannot believe it."

He smiled approvingly, his kind, gray eyes betraying the assent that our minds were thinking.

"Like a page of 'Faust,' is it not? And 'Faust,' we know, was fiction. What concerns us here is that we are dealing in facts, and that George Witherspoon is not lying. One thing we know, and that one thing we can work on. He has sold his soul."

"You believe it?"

"Most assuredly."

"Then the other is the devil. I accept it. What use would one man have for the soul of another?"

"That is just the point," said the Master. "It is all inexplicable. We must solve it, but we have at last made a beginning; we have now a hypothesis to work on—we know a few things. George Witherspoon is hardly human. He has sold himself to the devil; and last and greatest of all he is the devil's master."

I SHOOK my head. It was too much for me. I was willing to accept almost anything, but did not wish to rush into absurdity; I could only say:

"His master?"

"Did you not read the letter? The picture on the side wall—the thing of evil—its agony and its torture."

Then I grasped it.

"You mean—" I exclaimed.

"Exactly. George Witherspoon had

thrown him to his torment. Not a thing could help him except surrender. Whatever this one is that has taken George to the mountain, he has been outwitted by his victim. 'The earth and all its fullness.' George chose wisdom, everything —even the powers of the devil. Though he was wicked, he gave no pledge that he would remain forever evil; he retained, even when in the hands of this one, his innate manhood. The other is all evil; George has some good. Therefore he is the stronger.

"Hatred is ever narrow. This thing, whatever it is, hated Roselle, because she had inspired George again into virtue. And it hated George, and wished to watch him suffer. Hatred can never resist a desire for gloating. It struck George with blindness that he might never again behold his loved one; her beauty was to be, to him, sealed up forever. It was the mistake."

"In what way?"

"He left Witherspoon's mind unimpaired. And Witherspoon is the Rebel Soul. He struck back like lightning. He hesitated not one second to enter into combat, even with such a one as this; he is greater even than the one who made him—and he knows it. Roselle beheld what happened."

"And George?"

"He removed himself and Roselle from further harm and danger. The other could not reach him. He was in torment —the torment might continue forever. Even the devil knows when he is beaten."

"And what happened?"

The old man's smile was almost a chuckle, a sort of triumph.

"The only thing that could have happened, Walter. On the fifth day of my vigil George opened his eyes and began laughing. His blindness was gone. The devil had surrendered!"

I thought a bit before I answered. It was incredible, but in this case true to form. At last I spoke:

"I suppose you have found some explanation?" I asked.

"I have not."

"But surely George—"

"Knows not a bit more than you or I do. He knows everything, apparently, but this. He has the power, almost, of spirit; but he knows not a thing of his own causation."

"You asked him?"

"We had a long talk," said the Master. "George is the Rebel Soul. He is incredible. He is impossible. He has powers that we cannot dream of. But in this one respect he is as much in the dark as we are."

"Then," I exclaimed, "Master, it can never be explained!"

He grew even more erect; his kind, mellow eyes looked straight at me; they flickered, as if quizzical at my doubt, but were determined to continue on the course unswerving.

"Oh yes, it can," was his answer.

"How?"

The answer came like a bombshell.

"You and I are going after this thing of evil."

I am free to admit such a statement was startling. I had become accustomed to a passive part in the drama, and it suited my temperament far better than courting active danger. I am not a brave man. I had no desire to be running about and burning my fingers by poking them at the devil. It was too uncanny, too full of shivers. If I must fight, I would far sooner take my frail, worn body out into the street and have it out in the daylight. I begged to be excused.

But the Master reassured me. In his kind way and persuasion he explained to me what he wanted. I was to be a spectator, nothing else. He worked on my love for my old playmate and Roselle; he asked me whether I wished to save them; he had clues that were invaluable, and that he thought would lead to the solving of the mystery. It was my duty.

It was the sort of logic that appealed to my better nature. I did love George, and I had as much feeling for Roselle as I would have had for a daughter. Though not my kindred, they were a veritable part of my destiny. I had been in the whole thing from the beginning; sometimes as an actor and at all times as a spectator. It was impossible, incredible, past all believing. All my teachings and faith had been perverted. George Witherspoon was forever dodging unharmed in and out through all our laws and reasons. There must be some explanation.

THE last is perhaps what most influenced my decision—that and my love and feeling. Even a banker cannot resist curiosity. I was human. As a mere man I longed to have the whole thing solved, to be present with my own eyes and ears at the dénouement.

As an animal I was afraid. But one

could not be mere flesh when near the Master. He compelled higher things, thinking, and lifted you in a plane above mere blood and materiality. It is needless to say that I consented.

The Master rose.

"It is well, Walter. I am glad. I wish to thank you. It is what you should do for your former playmate, for your loved ones. Now go and arrange your affairs for a long vacation. We do not know definitely just how long it will take us. It may be a month; it may detain us a year—perhaps longer. We shall start in about four days."

"Where do we go?" I asked, rising.

He conducted me to the door, his fine old hand on my shoulder.

"Leave that to me, Walter. And trust me. We shall find our way."

And so it was that I returned to the bank. I had a number of capable assistants, and it was easy to arrange for a vacation. In a very short time I had so regulated my business that my departure would be hardly noticed. I had taken several short vacations before; but never before one where my return might be postponed indefinitely. But, of course, it was my own bank that I was leaving, and therefore I could do as I pleased.

But with Clara it was a different matter. Here, I was not exactly—as they say in common parlance—the whole boss of the roost. I have often thought that she was even more the director of my affairs than I was. She was a woman and being such could pull the unseen strings that compelled me to dance to her pleasure. I suppose that is what men have wives for. Certainly I know it is one of the reasons wives have husbands.

She did not at all relish the idea of my going after this thing of evil. It made her shudder. At the first mention she placed her hands over her eyes to shut out the horror. In the first full force of the announcement she was terrified. I confessed, then, how little I was possessed of tact.

At first she was bitter—dead-set against it. She put her foot down and objected flatly. But when I had related the whole story, and she had time to think again of Roselle, she began to soften. With her it was much as it had been with myself. It was our love that stirred us. We could be selfish with our fears when we thought of ourselves, but not when we thought of the others.

The sorrow, the affliction, that had come into our lives might be placed behind us. What was our love if we could not stand the test of sacrifice? We would thrust ourselves into the crucible for their salvation.

Therefore it was that she softened. In a few days she, as well as I, was making ready for my departure. It was a time of trepidation and suppressed excitement, like the start of a great adventure. On the other ends of the poles were our loved ones. It was a pilgrimage into uncertainty, a sort of "Pilgrim's Progress" into the land of shadows. I, a banker with a poor, weak, wizen body was going forth like the knights of old to battle with the goblins.

And so the day wore around. I journeyed over to the city, and from the House of Sevens went with the Master to the railroad station. Of course Clara went along with us. She bore up bravely. It was not until we were about to board the train that she gave away to her feelings; and then at the depot a handkerchief made its appearance. But the Master reassured her.

"Do not worry, Mrs. Warren. There is no danger. It will soon be over. Just think of the ones whom we are after. Think of the sunlight, of love and beauty. We are going after George Witherspoon and Roselle."

Clara answered him through her tears; she nodded her head emphatically.

"I shall be brave, Master; I shall be brave. For Roselle's sake and Walter's."

With that we had our last farewell and were aboard the flier. I had not questioned him as to our destination. I was on the great adventure, and he was the pilot.

Somewhere in this sea of mystery was the island of enchantment. Roselle and George were the fairy ones held by the fiery dragon that we must seek and vanquish. We were two knights of romance.

It made me smile to think of it. A pair of knights, indeed! An old man and a weak and sickly banker. And we were going forth to enter into combat with the devil. Was there ever such a picture?

We sped southward, first along the bay shore, then over the mountains, and finally out in the hot, dry valley that lay between the two great ranges like a broad, bare channel. I asked no questions, but consumed my time with the papers, and half-interested glances out of the windows. As we turned south

again down the valley, through the extended expanse of dry, hot stubble, stretching interminably to the shimmering foothills, I speculated on our destination.

The city of the southland, the land of sunshine! And I could not but give a dry smile at the paradox of the settings. Somehow, always in this case everything must be unusual. It was a case where the upside down must ever be foremost; and where the impossible was the possible. From the beginning it had flaunted the colors and filmy uncertainties of a long-drawn dream. Would there be no awakening?

CHAPTER XXXV

IN THE FOG

IT WAS morning when we arrived. A fog had settled, and a chill wind was blowing in from the water. The air was permeated with the salt that was the ocean. It was chilly, cutting, shivering to the very marrow. After the great heart of the valley, one felt the cold more than keenly. Outside of the depot we stopped involuntarily and gazed out into the streets at the grim shadows that were half concealed by the mist and the dripping moisture. A gust of wind splashed the fog into our faces.

"Like peeking into chaos," I remarked.

The Master nodded. His beard was already wet with clinging dampness.

"Like chaos," he assented. "You have named it, Walter. But let us hope that it is not exactly true to the appellation. The fog is unusual. May it not be prophetic?"

Whatever he implied, my interpretation of it was interrupted by a lurching of crowded humanity. Cries, shouts, and clamor, and swirling pedestrians. Another train must have arrived, and our two crowds had commingled.

Everybody was hurrying, swinging past us in hasty confusion. Shouts of newsboys, barkers, and a clangor of bells emerged from the fog-bank. A car swung around the circle, hesitated for a moment for its load of passengers, and turned again toward the city. I noted casually that the crowd divided and parted up the sidewalks without so much as noticing one another. Then I saw that in each car were a number of policemen. A newsboy ran out in the street and shook his fist at the conductor.

Then I remembered. The employees of the electric railways were on a strike. The city was in a turmoil. The papers had been full of it, but my mind had been so engrossed with our mystery that I had allowed it to slip almost unnoticed through my memory.

However, it apparently meant nothing to the Master. He sauntered forward, and as he was my guide I could do nothing but follow, although I must confess that I had no desire to ride upon one of these cars that bore only freighted peril. At the curb he halted.

I ventured a suggestion. I had no conviction one way or another; in such questions as this I always held the good American view—there is justice on both sides. I never insisted on riding—partly, I suppose, because I had never yet found the soft side of a brick.

But the Master smiled.

"There is no danger," he said. "We shall ride upon the Municipal; their men are not striking. A car should be along in a moment."

It came. But not until most of the throng had scurried away from the depot. Still, when it swerved about the circle, a good-sized group were waiting. In the jumble, I ascended to an outside seat with the Master. In a moment we were shunting into the city.

I would have approved of an inside seat, but there was not much room, and the car was comfortably filled with women. So I settled down to my place, and wished that my coat was warmer. The wind was cutting through the cold, wet fog-bank with a stab that was like a knife-thrust. I was sitting at the end of the seat next to the wall of the car, where I could get some shelter. Next to me was the Master; beyond him was another.

Like most passengers, I made the customary cursory half analytic examination of my companions. I always do it—I suppose because it is part of human nature to make a conjecture of one's fellows. One almost always finds some character that diverts or arrests attention. From a sweep of the whole car, my mind reverted back to one individual—the man who was seated directly beyond the Master. One glimpse of that face was enough to inspire apprehension.

He was an old, old man, very small, and, from the way he had of leaning with both hands folded over his cane, very feeble. His feebleness was what first

drew my attention—that, and his fingers, and the sinister way he had of clenching and unclenching his hands. There was something about their very tensity and the tightness with which they would clench that held attention. Here must be bitter thinking. I wondered half absently what the owner of such tight, hideous talons might look like. And it happened, even as I glanced up, that the Master moved slightly, so that I could see. I started.

I must confess that never had I beheld such a face, so old and aged, and so unlike man as we know him. The skin, what I could see of it, was crinkled and shriveled like rotten parchment; by an incongruity, the whiskers were black and bushy; the nose slightly hooked, sensitive, and cadaverous; the lips thin, compressed, slightly drooping, and cruel and selfish to a degree that induced a shudder. Then I saw the eyes; they were such a climax that I forgot all his other features.

They were not eyes at all, but twin spots of darkness. They burned and gleamed and glimmered; they were malevolent, hot, and hating—two flaming dots of sin. For a moment they burned into me until I squirmed: their brilliance was red-hot. I drew back for shelter behind the Master. It was my action that drew the man's attention to my comrade.

It was a moment I shall not forget when those two dots of sin centered upon the Master. The little one started and drew erect with a snap; the eyes went sharp, then quavered with a wonderful recognition. It seemed to me that here was fear; but if there was, it was almost choked out with hatred. It was sudden, sharp, and burning; if it was fear, it was a fear that was terrible in its tenseness—the cunning of a madman.

The eyes grew hotter, scintillating with a flaming iridescence; the straight, cruel lips trembled and the vulture nose twitched slightly; it was the convulsive focusing of a hard, cruel nature, of a soul that was burning out with defiance—an unspoken superlative imprecation.

The Master did not notice; or if he did, he maintained a serenity that was goading. The other leaned slightly over; the talons closed silently, fiercely, about the cane; the lips were moving. The Master smiled.

Even there in the car it was uncanny. Somehow I knew, on the moment, that these two had some sort of affinity; that between these two old men, as opposite as the poles, there was some connection.

The effect of my companion's smile was immediate. The other subsided, turned about, and again faced the traffic; but I noticed that now the hands clenched harder.

I COULD not but wonder. I had never before seen such a creature. And he was dressed much like the Master—the same black cloak, long sleeves, the garb of the ascetic. At a backward glance, where one could not see their faces, one would have classified them as mystics of a kindred order.

Just then the Master turned slightly; his eyes were impregnated with significance, and he nodded. It was confirmation of my suspicions. He knew him.

By this time we had reached the crowded retail business section of the city. The fog had grown still denser. On the sidewalk, shifting up and down, the pedestrians stalked with the sauntering vagueness of ghosts. Automobiles greased heavily over the pavement; the moist-laden clatter of delivery sogged through the fog-bank; the car halted intermittently for passengers and again surged forward. I was cold and miserable.

We had come to the heart of the city. Out of the density I could hear the clatter of many hammers, the clinking of steel, and the noise of riveters. The fog lightened suddenly; and out of the sky, out of a building, I watched a long rope dangle. The car stopped suddenly. A girl, not more than a child, fair-haired and very pretty, ran out from the sidewalk. She motioned, and waited timidly until the car had stopped.

I smiled as I watched her wait for the complete cessation of the car's movement; a supplementary picture of a mother's warning giving the explanation of her caution. She was tremulously eager, for all her precaution. One little hand she held out eagerly; with the other she clutched her bundle. She was very pretty. Her skin was of that delicate sheen of color that is never given except in childhood; her curls were glistening with the moist crystals of the fog mist. Surely she was the last thing in the world that could presage a tragedy.

There are some scenes in life that have no transition. There was no warning, and it was so incredible as to be unthinkable. I can only tell of it from a horrified

recollection. I can still hear an oath and a guttural, hateful imprecation; and a sort of vision of our strange passenger rising from his seat and springing forward. It was catlike and tragic—and withal inhuman. The child screamed and drew back in terror.

The two are quite mixed in my memory; indistinct, but for all that vivid. The old man, hateful, his white lips working, springing off the car at the little, defenseless form beneath him. The child holding up her arms for protection, screaming. It was but an instant. Before we could reach them, he had caught her by the throat, shaken her as a terrier shakes a rat, and flung her to the sidewalk. I think the fellow laughed—a low, sickly gurgle.

I had jumped, and so had the Master. But the fellow was much too quick. I have memory of those beady black eyes and triumph, burning an unholy hatred. Then he plunged into the fog-bank.

We picked the little form up tenderly. For a moment there was confusion. The passengers descended; the conductor, note-book in hand, was volleying a storm of pertinent questions. Strange to say, no one had seen but myself and the Master.

We explained the best we could: the conductor was mollified when he found that the company had been blameless. It is strange how hard-hearted some individuals become in the pursuit of duty. He shrugged his shoulders and pulled the bell-cord for departure; as he explained, his car was tied to schedule; we could call the police.

Would that we could! A crowd had gathered out of the gloom like magic—a maddened, surging, ominous throng that was fast fluxing into a frenzy. The senseless child, limp and tender, with blood trickling over its face. The open scalp wound in the curls infuriated all who beheld it.

It was an evil moment. Here was a spark that might set fire to a city. I heard the confused, sharp ejeculations about me: "Scabs! Strike-breakers! Murderers!"

The car had passed on. The whole city was in a turmoil of partizan passion; a static repression that lacked but the incident for spontaneous flaming. We had stepped out of the security of innocence into this moment of no rime nor reason.

In an instant I grasped the purport; a twisted truth had grasped the crowd about us; a perversion that but for speedy help might impend close on a tragic ending. I had ears to hear it—words that were too hasty and too insistent for denial.

"Some rich old money-bags had, from the steps of a scab car, attacked this little child out of pure vindictiveness. And he was an old man clad in black!"

The Master held the child in his arms. A workman had hurried with some water. He was bathing her forehead. An ambulance had been summoned. Every second the crowd was augmented by fresh additions, white-faced, hating, clamorous. Down the street I could hear the crash of breaking windows.

And that moment of all others! The Master was bearing the child tenderly toward the sidewalk. The water had refreshed her; her eyes had opened. They were wide with innocent wonder and incomprehension, blinking in half-conscious fright at the writhing throng that seethed about her. One little hand she raised wonderingly to her forehead. It was a simple movement. A tiny trickle of blood oozed down her fingers. She was puzzled. She gazed at it in absent bewilderment. Then she beheld the black robe of the Master.

I shall never forget that sudden flash into consciousness, nor the scream she uttered. It was terrifying from one so little. Her mouth was open and her eyes wide staring, her curly head thrown back, and her hat hanging by its ribbon.

In a perfect hysteria of terror she fought and struggled. In vain were the endeavors made to calm her. She struck like a little fury, shrieking into incoherence. The jam pressed closer.

The old man could not hold his squirming burden. A burly plasterer plucked her out of his arms. She clung to him; her finger pointed accusingly at the Master.

"It was him done it!" she cried. "It was him! He tried to kill me!"

It was a second that was foredooming! The crowd was frenzied; a perfect sea of madness. There was no place nor chance for reason. The assault on the little girl and her accusing finger was the spark of a conflagration.

A perfect storm of fists and hardened faces; my hat knocked off, my face cut and bleeding. What followed had no coherence. My mind was swirling; looking into a sea of faces. Shouts, cries, clamor, and hard fists shaking! Men and

women of all ranks and all stations.

The multitude writhed and extended, crescended with waves of hatred. It was so terrible that I remember but one single detail—that, and an ominous impotence. That one thing was a woman, far up the street on the sidewalk.

She was fat and screaming. She was lashing with perfect fury; her strident, cutting voice pierced through the clamor, devoid of reason or of mercy; the primal instinct for bloodshed, the symbolic goddess of the mob lust.

"The rope! The rope! The rope!" a cry went up. It was answered by a wave of crackling laughter. "The rope is all handy, waiting.'" The throng opened. Our captors bore us roughly before the unfinished building. From its top, suspended like a line out of eternity, was the rope dangling to the sidewalk. The impending peril settled my mind to clearness.

I looked out on the sea of hardened faces, and could understand from that minute the animal that is mankind, the certain atavism that is his in supreme moments. In the crucial, distinctive crisis he reverts in the administration of his justice, to his forebears. He is revengeful. In all that throng there was not one eye of mercy. Then I saw the Master.

He was standing before me on a pile of sand that was being used in construction. On either side were men who were to act as hangmen. He was standing erect as always, and as calm as ever. There was not one muscle of his face that did not bear up to his dignity. What a contrast there was in the old man's coolness to my trembling terror!

The Master, his black robe, his beard, his impassiveness and majestic imperturbability, the sea of faces, the rope hanging out of the fog from an unseen height, some boxes, and a platform used for mixing concrete. That was the picture. It looked much like the last. Our short shrift would soon be ended.

But at that moment, even in my fear, I caught out of the tail of my eye a commotion in the crowd. It began in the outskirts, rolled in a narrow lane, and advanced straight to the center.

I watched it expectantly, trusting that it might be succor. The crowd swerved and parted, opening a narrow lane. In its center, walking erect and alone, was a single figure. He was bareheaded, blond, and curly, a derby hat hanging from his hand as if he just had doffed it. He advanced, looking to neither right nor left, and with easy, athletic step sprang lightly to the platform.

It was George Witherspoon!

CHAPTER XXXVI

A MASTER OF MEN

FOR some seconds he said not a word. It was one of the tensest episodes that I have ever passed through. He peered down into that multitude, into its very soul, with a magnetism that could be no other's.

Not a word was spoken. I don't know how he did it, but the clamor and roar of the mob abated with the suddenness and peace of a tempest dying. A myriad of upturned faces, white, silent, eager!

There was something that passed above them, that ruled them and controlled them. A manifestation of brute force dying; of that psychic mystery that has guided man out of apehood. It was silent, potential, magnetic.

Not a word. Whatever he was, devil or angel, he held them. I could not but thrill with awe as I watched him. He had not grown old. Not one wrinkle nor decrepit line was there in his features. Always twenty; the same vitality, beauty, and stalwart manhood. He was bareheaded; his hair had the same golden sheen; there was the same scintillating genius in his bearing—defiance and certainty of action.

The throng was awed into silence, hushed to an expectancy that was vibrant, thrilled, taut, keyed. It was like a current, some great wave, some secret oscillation. It was surrender. Before he had spoken a single word he had conquered.

But what would he say? What was the import of this sudden apparition?

Like a flash, I was submerged in the suddenness of my dismay and terror. Across my consciousness flashed the exploits of his hatred. He had never yet shown mercy. Never once since our boyhood had he altered the attitude of his malignant persecution. He had been evil, great, destructive, consuming, pursuing me through my manhood.

I was afraid; morally, physically, mentally afraid; I was afraid all over.

The heavy rope was ominous. It was vibrant, trembling as in eagerness for its victim. Would it be that my life so punctilious, and of such serene, smug respect-

ability, would be sacrificed in such a climax!

Just then, as if by magic, the fog suddenly broke and lifted. A shaft of golden light broke from the heavens, shining slantwise—the sun was still low in the sky—across the crest of a neighboring building.

The multitude was still in the shadow. But George Witherspoon was lighted, bathed in the effulgence. The effect was electric; somehow, even the elements conspired to make every move dramatic.

At the same instant he sprang into speaking. I say sprang because it is literal interpretation. It was action, fierce and wild, a dominant invective; a speech that could have been delivered by no other living mortal. He harangued and goaded them with defiance; threw into their teeth their brutish conception of justice.

He shamed them. Before every man's eye he portrayed a picture, loathsome, decadent, of bestiality and injustice; he deprived them of their manhood, and, in the fierceness of his rhetoric, condemned them to the realm of reptiles.

It was sublime. One man defying the wrath of thousands. The very audacity won their admiration. His fearlessness and denunciation carried them off their feet. He bore them down, trampled them by the sheer magnitude of his spirit and the full sweep of his genius.

He would save us! The full rush came on me. George Witherspoon, my playmate, he who was the Rebel Soul, performing an act of justice! In the blur of my fading terror, in my astonishment, I could not comprehend it. It was impossible; but there was no refutation.

He stood there, fiercely calm, watching every tremor of the multitude. He reminded me much of a god of old, delivering an injunction. No compromise; he would have naught but the obeying.

But there was one in that throng who had not heard him. I saw his shadow looming on the platform; a figure skulked about the cylinder that was used for mixing concrete. It lifted full up and straightened. I gasped.

It was Simpson, our police chief!

I had forgotten. It has been so long since I had thought of Simpson. Since the night of my incarceration he had dropped out of my mind entirely. He had been so set in his conviction of George's death that I thought he had abandoned the case entirely.

But it was he beyond mistaking. In the greediness of his spirit he had not heard a word that had been uttered. To him there was but one thought and purpose—the capture and the twenty-thousand-dollar reward. And whatever may have been his faults, he was not a coward.

The crowd sensed the tragedy. The very picture of that figure skulking up behind tensioned their taut excitement to a deadened silence. Faces whitened, mouths agape with wonder.

THE skulker was a man of splendid stature; straight, and of that finesse and glowing vitality that belongs to clean, pure manhood. He was an athlete. He towered above the other by half a head.

But he was not like George Witherspoon. I am sure every man in the throng sensed it. He had not the spirit, the dare, nor the heart half devil. A mere man; he had not that scintillating action that was like the lightning.

In his hand he had an automatic pistol.

It was but a second. The intensities of climax come in shortest moments. He placed his hand on George Witherspoon's shoulder.

"You are under arrest!"

Never shall I forget it. Nor, I am sure, any one who saw it.

George Witherspoon turned. He was smiling. For the split of a second he was all nonchalance. Then a blur of action that was too fast for the eye to follow. The automatic flew into the air with a crackled explosion. For an instant there was a whir of action, feet, and fury. Then out of it all—George Witherspoon.

In his arms, above his head, was the struggling form of Simpson. He lifted it as he would a stick of cordwood, heaved it, hurled it, spinning, out onto the sandpile.

The multitude broke its silence. Already under his spell, it rippled with an awe that swelled and rolled into a roar of admiration. It was tumultuous, the spontaneous enthusiasm men have for feats of prowess. To his psychic force he had added a feat of muscle. The throng that but a moment before had been so swayed by hatred was now equally enthusiastic in its admiration. Such is mankind.

At last the police. Deep sirens cutting into the thousands. The heavy, speedy motors drew up before the plat-

form. A number of patrolmen quickly formed a circle. On the platform was George Witherspoon, laughing. The first officer stepped up to him, nodded familiarly, conversed for a moment, and glanced in our direction.

Simpson rolled over, dug the sand out of his ears, and gazed about him. He seemed puzzled. Either he had had enough, or his mind was clouded. His actions were slow and wooden. He glanced up at the other and shook his head. Then, like one bewildered, he turned and was lost in the crowd about him.

The first officer came over to us. The others cleared the street for traffic.

"Rather tragic," he remarked. "If you don't mind, I shall escort you to safety. We were a little tardy. I think that we can all be thankful to Mr. Witherspoon. It is one of the regrettable accidents that are incident to a troubled city."

"Then," I exclaimed, "you know him?"

"Who—Witherspoon? Well, I should think so. I have known him all my life."

It was the same. Ever he received protection. The very police were with him. At one word from him they were ready to let us go and to afford us their protection. However just I knew it to be, it did not sound logical.

"But," I exclaimed, "the crime—the assault on this child? How do you know that we are not guilty?"

He smiled.

"I have Mr. Witherspoon's word, Mr. Warren. Also, I have my eyes. And do you think that any one in reason, after a look into this old gentleman's face, would believe him guilty? One hardly expects bankers and philosophers to be traveling about assaulting little children. Besides, we have other evidence, and of far more purport."

George Witherspoon had disappeared. I have an indistinct memory of a heavy roadster threading through the traffic and his mounting beside the driver. We were left safe and sound in the hands of the lieutenant. It was best that we accept his hospitality and his offer of conducting us to our hotel in safety. After the reception that we had received he was glad, indeed, to make some sort of an atonement.

ONCE in our rooms, in peaceful quiet out of all the stress and tumult, I looked to the Master. The events of the morning had been so tempestuous and so out of the ordinary as to be bewildering.

I had been led to believe, to be sure, that we were on the great adventure, but I had no idea that we were to begin it by a veritable leap into the whirlpool. It was impossible, out of reason, twisted and distorted. It was kaleidoscopic, a mass of scenes and excitement, each one distinct and indelible, but for all that shuffled into a whirring blur of consecution. My mind was whirring; it might have borne a load that was placid, but this tossing, seething puzzle of events was too much for its unraveling.

Nevertheless, there was one thing—yes, two things—that stood out plainly; the old man on the car, and George Witherspoon.

The old man—I might call him the apparition—was a being such as I had never beheld in my lifetime. Not in a thousand years could I forget those black eyes burning. I could shut my eyes and see them—two great cavernous holes licking with liquid flame. They were immeasurable depths, unholy, that reached into the beyond and forever. The great menace of the unrelenting! I could feel it reaching out and clutching, crushing out my spirit.

Then the contrast; the great, flashing, scintillating genius of Witherspoon. It had been years since last I had seen him. He was sunshine, immense, splendid, and magnificent. The old glow of his boyhood, the heat, the passion, the glamour, were unabated.

I could see him as he was when he faced that multitude, calm, beautiful, defiant. When he chose to be so, there was something about him that was out of heaven. The very light and sunshine that had that moment broken from above confirmed it. He was the antithesis of the other; the glory of the infinite condensed and centered; the great Man Spirit, real and eternal.

Yet I felt that they were the same. There was some link that bound them; one could not exist without the other—the positive and the negative—the two great poles that were as far apart as the wide reach of eternity. What were they? —the one coruscating with the beauty of heat and life and action; the other shivering with the somberness of death and withering hatred. The one all sunshine, the other darkness. What were they?

I appealed to the Master. He smiled.

"A little bit like the schoolboy, Walter.

You would have the answer before you have solved the problem; answers are not of much value unless we understand the means of their derivation. It is the problem that concerns us.

"It is the great, mysterious thing almost unfathomable that must be solved. It is some great truth of Cosmos that has escaped the keen detection of the mind of man."

Riddles as of old; the Master always talked in riddles. If it was a law, what law was it? I confess that I was impatient. If he knew, why did he not tell me?

"I do not know, Walter," he continued. "You must not overweigh my wisdom. I can merely conjecture. I am only mortal, and being mortal, can only arrive at results by material facts and logical sequence. It is the one great lameness of metaphysical speculation. We are objective; we live on facts and figures. It is the great bar by which the infinite is barricaded against the inquisitiveness of mankind."

I could understand him now. I was a skeptic from my father. I had felt always the impotency of man when he dipped into the depths and shadows. My answer was to my convictions.

"Yes," I replied, "and it shall be so always. There is a barrier that is great and unattainable; we can never surmount it."

He smiled again.

"You are pessimistic. Would you lose faith in God's creation, or in God Himself? Would you believe that the will on high is black negation? If you would, you are walking backward; you are retracing toward time's beginning."

"But what do you mean?" I asked. "I am a Christian, Master. What do you mean?"

"Merely this. We go on forever. Once created, we go forward, never ceasing. It is the axiom of all religions, the one law of all eternity, that God makes no mistakes. We shall surmount the barrier."

"You mean—"

"That it is a case of evolution. Evolution is the law of God. When the time comes we shall emerge from the objective. The mind of man is growing, changing, evolving; he is a babe in the lap of Time; he is just opening his eyes to the light about him; he is just beginning."

"Catching moonbeams," I suggested.

"Exactly. An infant, helpless, puzzled, and weak; but beautiful. He is but just started on the path of time. We know not what he will attain to."

I nodded. Why question?

"But what," I asked, "has this to do with our mystery?"

"Just this, Walter," he answered. "We may be the first ones to peek over the barrier."

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE HOUSE OF SILENCE

A BELL rang, and a boy handed the Master a slip of paper, which he read carefully, as if the message it bore might be of weighty purport.

"Is he waiting?" he asked when he had finished.

The Master turned to me.

"Our stay here has been short. We are more fortunate than I had hoped for. We shall leave immediately."

"Leave!" I exclaimed. I was hardly steeled. "And where to? We have but arrived."

He picked up his suit-case.

"Come," he said, "we must be going. We are now on the great adventure."

Wonderingly I followed him into the elevator across the lobby and then to the sidewalk. At the curb a closed car was waiting; not an ordinary jitney, but a great heavy car of beautiful lines and finish. Two negroes, uniformed in a cloth of greenish color, were in attendance, one on the seat and the other imperturbable, straight as a statue, on the curb.

At a word from my companion he smiled blandly, after the manner of his class, and opened the door. I followed the Master. The negro climbed on the seat with the chauffeur, and the car moved forward.

I settled back on the cushions. It was a quick transition. The rapidity with which things were moving was bewildering. I had waited months for a single word or clue, and now the suddenness of the day's events had dazed me.

Out of the window I watched the flitting houses of the receding city. I had an uncertain feeling, clutchingly pregnant, that we were passing out of the present; that the realism of life was gliding past us, to be left behind like a thing forgotten. We were bound for the future, over into the beyond, into the gossamer realms of fancy. It was like a dream, unreal, fascinating, fearful. There

was something that was alluring beckoning us on, a will-o'-the-wisp that flashed intermittently out of the darkness, ever so near, but never nearer.

I looked at the Master.

He was sitting beside me, snugly comfortable and contented. His serene composure was not a bit ruffled by the untoward experiences that we had passed through, nor was he at all unstrung as to the impending future. It was the way of the Master. He accepted all conditions, looked straight into the hearts and read the secrets. He had no emotions. It was his age perhaps, or perhaps his wisdom.

"Where are we going," I asked, "and in whose car are we riding?"

He reached his hand into his coat.

"The car is George Witherspoon's," he answered. "As to our destination, you may read." He handed me a paper.

My dear Master:

I have never refused you a thing in my life. Your request is granted. If you still insist on imperiling your life—so be it. Remember that I have warned you; that once across the border I cannot help you. I have despatched a machine and placed it at your disposal. If you are still determined, it is not for me to stop you.

But let me caution; once again let me warn you. It is certain death that awaits you. The one whom you would encounter is not to be weighted up lightly. Even I who hold him equal have not conquered. I am in the borderland, and I am afraid to let you enter. I do not deserve it.

It is best, I think, that you let matters take their course. Why sacrifice a great life such as yours for one so undeserving? My life is not worth it. With sincerest good wishes,

Your old pupil,
George Witherspoon.

Had I not beheld a miracle but two hours back, had I not with my own eyes seen it and been such an interested recipient of his inspired justice, I would not have believed it. Even then it was impossible to my reason.

His status had become settled in my conception: I had relegated him to a class half devil. George Witherspoon with one iota of mercy! George Witherspoon solicitous for another's safety! It was impossible—it could not be!

And yet it was so. By some great transition, some uncomprehensible twist of fate, he had at last discovered to us one point of virtue. He was concerned over our peril. He—George Witherspoon.

The thought frightened me; it dismayed me. I am not brave, and I am frank enough to confess it. If it could wring from him such a note of apprehension, I was surely justified in my terror. But I said nothing.

In fact, I was too frightened to do much talking. A cold, clammy numbness settled down upon me that chilled my heart and marrow. I looked out of the window.

We had passed out of the city. We were gliding over the broad sweep of the boulevard that leads up to the foot-hills; in the distance I could see the blue sheen and the white wave-crests of the Pacific. Far out a steamer trailed a line of smoke as it plowed slowly southward; nearer shore a yacht or two, with gleaming white sails, and a flock of careening seagulls.

Where were we going? What fantastic haunt was to be our destination? We mounted a hill and dipped suddenly into a little valley—the greenest greeen of ripe alfalfa—workmen busily pitching hay, and the rattle of the mowers, miles of quiet contentment, prosperity, and work.

I passed back the paper.

"You are afraid, Walter?" asked the Master.

He smiled. "So was Simpson," he said. "I saw him for a moment after the street incident. He threw up his hands. 'I'm through with this case,' he said. 'Some one else can have the reward—if they can earn it.'"

We passed out of the little valley and began the ascent of the foot-hills. From the heights we could look back on the scene below us. I was a bit ashamed that I had confessed myself a coward.

"Would you like to see Roselle?" asked the Master.

"Roselle!" I exclaimed. "Roselle! Are we going to Roselle?"

"Perhaps. And so you would be glad to see her. What would you do for Roselle?"

"Oh," I said, "anything. I would give my life."

"Of course you would, Walter; you are not a coward, and you are not frightened. You are just a bit nervous."

Well, I had justification. It was not exactly such a train of circumstances as to throw me into high and gleeful spirits. When stepping into a noose one is likely to be a little doleful. So I told him.

"Yes," he said; "it is a bit ominous. But

not as much so as you think. I trust that we can surmount the dangers. We may be merely an old man and a sickly banker; but we are not afraid. We are armed with more than weapons, and I think that we shall conquer."

The machine made no noise. At that moment it came to me that we might be overheard. We had not said anything exactly incriminating; but still it might be best to be a little cautious. I pointed to the driver.

"Can these men hear us?"

"Hardly," he said. "Did you not notice?"

"What?"

"They are mutes."

"Oh!" I looked at him and then out of the window. "Mutes!" It baffled. It was enough that they should be negroes, but that they should be mutes as well was a bit too weirdly suggestive. It was unnatural; it was attuned too much to the cruel and subtle, the silken finesse of a genius—and a genius that was evil.

WE HAD mounted into the highlands. Below the mottled lowlands breathing with undulating verdure stretched with varied brilliance into the dim blue distance. The highway was following the backbone of a broad plateau. Portals and driveways and half-seen villas, white in the Southern sun, nestled into the cool of the lawns and palmtrees. The avenue, broad, paved, smooth as a dance-floor, tunneled through the verdure.

We reached the crest. The trees were larger and much older than any others on the boulevard. They had attained the size of forest monarchs, lifting their feathered heights into the heavens; the very wind, soothing, caressed them with veneration; there was a solemnness about the sound that was prophetic, an eery song that was a warning and a benediction.

The car swerved, turned into a driveway. The view was such as to bring an exclamation; far sweeping on every side into the distance. The city, though miles away, was at our feet for inspection; the blue of the ocean, and on the other side a bay that was flecked with the white sails of pleasure. We had entered an immense park, far-stretching, level, a solemn reach of dark green and shadow, an artificial paradise of subtle and trim precision.

I say subtle, because from the moment that we swung through the great stone pillars, when we whirred upon the crest with its glimpse of the panorama below us, I had the exhilarating and altogether inexplicable sensation that one might sense in cloudland. There was something in the feel of the place that was of remoteness, of isolation, of a distance from one's fellows. I can hardly explain it; it is hard to get at the inner secrets of one's sensation, it is one of the intricacies of the human mind that defies plain explanation; perhaps it was intuition.

The whole place was of great beauty, quaint, quiet, secluded, pervaded by a calm of permeating softness. As we twisted about the clean driveways my spirits were quashed and dampened. I might say that the air was saddened—it was redolent and soft with aromatic odors, sweetened into excess of sweetness —into the bitter. It was much as though we had suddenly passed out of the broad bright sunshine into the portals of melancholia.

It was startling. My first sensation was a tightened gripping at my throat and an accelerated pulse. There was no wind. Upon this height where the breeze should be always blowing was a quiet, perverse calmness. Shade and seclusion, a deadened paradise looking out upon the world, but of a different world entirely.

But the greatest surprise was to follow. We turned a bend and came into full view of the mansion. Why do I say mansion? It was like riding through the pages of fiction up to a cold stone fortress of a feudal baron. It was torn out of the past and transplanted. It was too great to have an equal, and too awful; a stern, cold structure that loomed over all the landscape. It was of stone—hard, cold granite piled and cemented with such care that had it been in another age it might have defied the embattled thousands.

I shall not go into detail. It would be useless. I cannot describe it better than my own impression—that of the Bastile, the old French Bastile. It had all the solemn grandeur and defiance and the majesty that was frozen. The very sunshine that bathed its sides seemed impotent; there was a dunness to its color that was grim and a somberness that was of shadow.

The towers at the corners stood out despotic, high, forlorn, like the four great tyrants, their castellated tops serrated with merlons and embrasures. The dank

It was a superlatively cruel face; the most cruel I had ever seen! And the eyes—they were two burning spots of sin, scintillating with a flaming irridescence of pure hate

brown walls were interpolated with gleaming windows about which some bold green ivy, creeping daringly up the sides, wreathed and twisted surreptitiously as if desiring to read in the depths a great cold secret. The whole structure must have covered an acre and had but a single modern feature, a portico whose massive colonnade united the two front towers at the corners. From it a flight of marble steps descended to the driveway.

Our machine stopped directly before it. When I looked up at the great massive columns of marble, I had much the same feeling that *Agib* must have had at the tower on the Brassy Mountain. A man standing at the head of the steps was like an insect, such was the vastness of the contrast.

One of the mutes descended. He opened the door. We alighted. In another instant the car had disappeared. I looked at the Master.

"Well," he said, "we are here."

He spoke it with satisfaction, as if we had come on a long, far journey. From our height we could look out on the blue of the far Pacific; the immense distance and the isolation was an inspiration.

"Yes," I said, "we are here. But, for all that, where are we? It is like enchantment, like the imagination—"

But the Master was ascending the steps. I must follow. Above us, standing by a column, was a man. I noted with surprise that he was modern, a man much like myself. He was even smoking a cigar. There was something familiar. He was watching us quietly; he had a stubby gray mustache, eyes of the same steel color, and a derby hat that was pushed back from his forehead. Then I recognized him. It was Wilkins!

With outstretched hand he stepped forward; there was a glint of tragic humor in his eyes.

"Welcome, pilgrims, to the house of silence," he greeted us.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

WILKINS AGAIN

I HAD forgotten Wilkins. It had been so long since last I had seen him that he had vanished from my recollection. I was surprised to see him. Even had I not forgotten, I would hardly have expected to find him there ahead of myself and the Master. But it was he, nevertheless—the same stocky fellow, sober, clear-sighted, practical; his eyes with the same steel-like clearness, and in his manner a grimness that reminded one of a bull-dog. He was a man of hard, sterling ability, of an honesty that had in it not a fleck of compromise.

But if I was surprised, it was not so with the Master. He shook hands in his sober way and nodded. I even fancied that there was a look of satisfaction on his face.

"Well, well, we're here! At last."

Wilkins bit deep into his cigar. His legs were spread apart, his cold eye running up and down the Master.

"Yes, we're here, Master; but now that we're here, like Mr. Warren, I want to know what we are going to do with it?"

The Master smiled faintly.

"Something wrong, Mr. Wilkins?" he asked.

"Wrong? Come inside. I thought when I came here that at last I was to get some action. I am getting it, all right. I have been here two whole days; and during all that time I have not heard a whisper. It is like a place of enchantment, a great doomed castle. I have been monarch of all I survey and as isolated as though I were on an island."

The Master nodded.

"Mysterious, eh, Wilkins? Well, let us step inside."

Together we crossed the stone floor to the archway. The door was massive, of a black, heavy ebony material with a great brass plate and knocker. It was plain and simple, but of a somber color and of much resistance. Above, in cold raised metal, was the letter "W." It opened easily, and we entered. Somehow, at the moment I thought, and perhaps properly, of the Three Calendars of the Arabians.

We found ourselves in an immense hall of silent, splendid, and magnificent proportions, from which numerous archways led out to different parts of the building; a great hall that, from its magnitude and elaboration, brought us all three to a halt of wonder. It was much more beautiful than anything I had ever dreamed of. The ceiling was so high and of such an effect and intensification as to seem almost beyond conception. It was a splendid combination of French and English Gothic that some great mind had employed; high, elaborate fan vaulting that might from its intricacy and precision have consumed all the skill, patience, and genius of a master of the time of Henry VII. The whole was interwoven with a tracery and foliation that were wonderful; the walls rose up toward the vaulting with a flamboyant effect that was much like liquid fire.

The high ceiling, the magnitude, the almost unbelievable blending of delicate and living colors, had been done with such art that, had this one hall been known, it would have been prized as one of the glories to which the human mind at times attains. It had effect, depth, greatness, and proportion; its intricate blend of colors was the reflected soul of a master. Even the mosaic of a floor would have been too priceless for a king. It was the effect of flowers; an invaluable work of time and detail that gave the effect of a bed of roses. I had always thought of mosaics as things of cold, hard beauty; this was the first time I had ever thought of perfume of flowers woven into stone.

In this high, vaulted hall we three strangers out of the common white daylight stood like three puny insects, standing with ignorant feet at the portals of enchantment.

Wilkins dug his teeth into his cigar with a sort of savage pride of possession; his feet he spread apart.

"Now, listen," he said.

It was said in such a tone as one would announce the eighth wonder of the world, a peculiar accent of certainty—as if he held a secret that defied unraveling. We listened.

But I heard nothing; neither, I think, did the Master.

"Hear anything?"

"No."

"Well, neither did I, at first. But it will come. Just wait. Do not make a sound."

And we did, we three, there, side by side, like three wooden men of enchantment. At first it was nothing—not a

sound, a negation of all life and movement, a pall of stillness. There was not a quiver, not even the intimation of a breath. I had never known what it was to be in a perfect void of sound. It was more terrible than death. Then I heard it—it was the silence!

Impossible, you say. But let me ask—have you ever been in absolute silence? Of course not. There is always some infinitesimal vibration. And, after all, has silence any sound? It sounds like a paradox. May it not be that negative, dragged on into infinity, will at last verge around again into a positive? Anyway, I am sure I heard it. It may have been expectancy or the vibrations of my spirit, or it may have been that out of the very silence my ear-drums sprang into action.

It was like the wind—a low, sullen vibration coming out of the distance, a moaning sound of a thousand thrummings. One could almost see it. It crackled, rose in crescendo, and died away. It was startling. Yet there had never been a sound. It was not earthly.

Wilkins was sucking savagely at his cigar. There was a sturdiness about him that would not be shaken. He looked at me.

"How about it?" The words were curt.

"I—"

The Master said nothing.

The detective tapped himself on the forehead.

"I thought at first that I was becoming unbalanced. What I want to know—did you hear it?"

"It is strange," I answered, "strange and unaccountable, rather weird."

"Yet," said Wilkins, "there was not a sound. When first I heard it I confess I was a bit frightened. It is not physical. It is ominous and impossible. I think it comes from here—" He tapped his forehead. "It is reassuring, that you, too, should notice it. I thought at first it was my own hallucination. The whole house is just like that—even the servants."

He motioned with his thumb to the spot of our arrival.

"Did you notice? Your chauffeur?"

"Mutes!" I gasped.

He nodded emphatically and dug again at his cigar.

"Yep! Mutes! And as black as midnight. The devil's own combination. It gets me. I have been here two whole days. During that time I have roamed from cellar to the attic. It is like the house of *Blue-beard*."

"Or *Agib*," I interrupted. "*Agib* and the forty doors. After all, it must be interesting."

"Yes?" snapped Wilkins superciliously. "Yes? Try it by your lonely. Try it by yourself, with not a single sound or flutter for two whole days. You heard it. Each time you open a door it will greet you. But you have named it. *Agib* and the Arabian nights. And in the good old U. S. A."

Truly he was wrought into a high state of feeling. He was not a man of quick emotions, nor one to be borne away on fancy. He was practical and accustomed to hard, cold reason. But he was moved, and it was all the more impressive. There was something about it all, the atmosphere, the exterior, the place where we were standing, that was depressing. If it had had such an effect on Wilkins, strong, sturdy, fearless as he was, what would it do to a poor, weak, shriveled banker such as myself?

It was the Master who broke our broodings. As usual he was cheery. The subtleness of the affair had on him apparently no effect whatever.

"Come, gentlemen," he said kindly, "you are overwrought. It may not be as bad as you think. It is good to restrain one's feelings. We must not fall to superstition. Are there no servants?"

Just then a door opened, and a black, even as the others, stepped forward. This time I noticed. He, too, was a mute. He had the peculiar facial expression of all those who lack articulation. His uniform was of the same dark green; on the sleeves of which I noted the small lettered emblem of his lord and master—a gilded W, finely woven.

He picked up our suit-cases and conducted us to an elevator. It was modern. With a quick shift he had whisked us skyward. As we shot upward I commented mentally of this commingling of the past and the present; like everything else, the elevator was noiseless.

OUR apartments were such as would have suited even the most fastidious. There was sober splendor even in the bedrooms. From the stone casement of the window I could look out on the park and into the far distance. It was like peering into another world.

The waters of the Pacific were glittering with the million sunbeams and seemed a million miles away. Somehow it was like looking down on the ages.

Our toilets made, we discovered that we were hungry. At least, I did. I had been through so much and had crowded such a varied excitement into the single day, that in the sudden rush of my appetite I could have eaten the hard side of a board. One may be upheld by excitement for just so long; then the stomach must be served.

Another servant, also as the others. He could not speak; but with a gesture conveyed his meaning as easily as if he were speaking. I noted then that these fellows had intuition. They spoke not, neither did they hear, but for all that they had an uncanny exactness. They could understand you, and with but a gesture could convey a whole ream of meaning. They were ideal servants. I had heard of rich men's notions, but never of such an idiosyncrasy as this.

The man conducted us along the corridor. He was erect and powerful and of a certain sinewy, pristine grace, though so black that he might have been dug out of the earth's dark shadows.

As we went along I noted the building's almost unearthly beauty. The ceilings were high and vaulted, painted, and adorned by that hand that out-Angeloed even Michelangelo himself. It was like walking through the maze of genius—an amazing experience that was much akin to the high feelings of an ecstatic slumber. The very sense of the work about you, the beauty, the genius, the fine, delicate strokes, the soft blends and shades, charmed you and thrilled with their subtle and permeating beauty.

It was such a contrast to the grim outside. One could hardly expect such superlative taste to be housed in such a prison. It was such an effect as one stepping out of the winter into a rich, full-blooming garden. The smell of roses, the sweet full-scented breath of perfume, the air of the south wind. It was in perfect taste. Whoever designed it had been an artist.

It is but natural that I should take in hurriedly, and not without awe, the significant details of our surroundings. The whole place was on the same imposing scale. It had balance; there was nothing so insignificant but that, in its place, lent its modulation to the whole.

There is nothing in the true and in the highest art of greater effect than this precise and painstaking judgment of slightest details. It would be impossible for me to give a minute description. There are some things better described by their effect than by their details. The whole filled me with a whir and a subdued admiration.

But I must not neglect the staircase. It was the center and capital stroke that brought out the cardinal exclamation. It was here that the master mind that had so conceived and constructed had gone rampant in its greatness. It was such an affair as I could only conceive of in a dream—a masterpiece of genius and imagination. The long sweep and swing and symmetry swept from the upper floors with the beauty of gliding waters; the blue-white marble steps, the majestic curves, and a swing that was almost rhythm.

We were conducted to the dining-room. From the attentive attitude of the servants it was evident that we had been expected. There was a courtesy about their silence and deference that was almost servile; they flitted about like shades, obsequious to our smallest notion; they had a solicitude for our wants, and an understanding that bordered on intuition.

The room was simple, decorated in dark, cool colors; and fittings of sober walnut. It was a place to induce contentment. The white linen, spotless as the snow, the tableware, and the faultless service. Even here was subtleness and proportion; there was a suggestiveness that aroused the appetite and soothed digestion.

The cuisine was perfect. I don't believe I had ever eaten a meal with more enjoyment. As a rule, my stomach has insisted on chosen morsels and steadily refused to delight in good things. But here even it was vanquished. The chef must have been a wonder.

"When I dine here," said Wilkins, "I feel that I could continue on this mystery forever."

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE MUSIC

THERE is no incentive to conversation like a good dinner. The Master had said almost nothing, nor had Wilkins. It was a way they had, both of them, of keeping their own good counsel. But now I felt somehow that I was at last to receive some information. It was the Master who spoke in his soft, kind way that was ever so sincere and earnest.

"Well, now Walter," he said, "now that

we are here and our appetites are satisfied, I suppose it is time that I give you some information. I have waited until we arrived at this place before speaking, because, to be frank, I was not at all certain that we would get here. One can never tell. However, I think now that we can speak. We are at last getting somewhere, and I think I am safe in saying that we are on the last leg of our journey."

I smiled at this, for we had come so far and our journey had been so great that this last leg might still be a long one. To me the case was growing deeper instead of approaching solution.

"It has indeed been a long time, Master, since first we took up the case," I assented.

"Yes, a long time," he returned.

He mused a bit; his eyes grew reminiscent. To him the mystery was more absorbing even than to myself. He was ever on some quest for wisdom, he was intent on the great secret that lurked unseen, but was directing with almost omnipotent exactness each sequence of the impossible. I trusted. I knew that it was not for nothing that we had come to this somber house of silence.

"Yes," he said, "a long time. But I do think we are approaching the solution."

"Pray, what is it?"

The Master was again silent for a moment. Wilkins and I were both of us eager for the answer.

"Have you no idea, Walter," he asked at length, "not even after reading Roselle's letter?"

"None," I answered, "that I would pin any faith to. I have endeavored many times to find a solution; but have arrived nowhere. It all seems so impossible. If—"

"No, Walter, it is not impossible. The facts are grim and certain. There has been not one thing done but through the perfect laws of nature."

"You mean," I exclaimed, "that there has been no trickery, no magic, in all his actions? How do you explain it? What are these laws?"

"Listen, Walter," said the Master. "You remember. Roselle herself has told you. 'The visitor in Berlin.'"

"You refer to the uncouth stranger," I answered, "the little man in the library?"

"Exactly."

I thought for a moment. I had thought of this same one many times before. And I had identified him this very day as the unspeakable villain of the street-car. The case was drawing closer.

"Do you believe it?" I asked. "Do you believe that, and still say there is no magic? Is he the monster that we saw today?"

"The same," returned the Master. "And it is not magic, but the truth. George Witherspoon that night explained the case. We have seen our man. And we shall take a literal interpretation."

"Then," I exclaimed, "it really is the devil!"

"I did not say that."

"I do not understand you."

The Master picked up a fork and tapped with the end of it on the table.

"Try to remember, Walter. Did not George Witherspoon say anything about *Frankenstein* and *Faust?*"

So that was it—the analogy.

"Yes," I said, "I remember. His case is analogous with one half-way between the two cases."

"Who was *Frankenstein?*"

"A genius," I replied, "who created a living being that has lived in fiction by the name of his maker."

"You know the story?"

"Certainly; the creation destroyed its author."

"And *Faust?*"

"A scholar. He sold himself to *Mephistopheles,* whom he cheated in the end."

"And you don't believe either one of these stories?"

I laughed, and looked wonderingly at the Master.

"Hardly," I said.

He moved back his chair.

"In that I can hardly blame you; they were both written as pure fiction. Nevertheless, George Witherspoon has told the truth. The analogy is there, half-way between them. This is one of the cases where truth is stranger than fiction. And in this house you will have the solution. *Frankenstein, Faust,* and *Mephistopheles* —we have them with us, and perhaps a few others besides. I do not say how many. You would do well to brush up on your fiction."

"Is that all?" I answered. I did not mean to be sarcastic. "A nice prospect, truly."

"Oh, they will not hurt you," he laughed. "Not if you are careful."

"But," I exclaimed, "the explanation? What is it all about? You were to tell us. George Witherspoon sent us hither. Why did he do it?"

He had risen; he had his hand on the chair back; on one finger I could see the monogrammed ring with the number seven.

"Yes, Walter, an explanation. I have given you as much as I can, all that I know myself. As for George Witherspoon, he is the lord of the house of silence, and it is by his consent that we are here. You know he has denied me nothing."

Which was so. The Master had ever, somehow, been able to retain a respect in the estimation of the other.

"So it is by his consent," I commented. "He is not laughing at us. Are you quite sure?"

"I do not think so. You must remember that George Witherspoon is the Rebel Soul, and fears nothing. He cares not a whit for our prying. He is above us."

"And Roselle?"

"She is safe and in France."

"And that is all?"

"That is all," he answered, "for a while. I am turning you over to Mr. Wilkins, who has some acquaintance with the place. I shall be in the library."

"Supposing," I queried, "supposing we should run across *Mephistopheles.*"

I don't know whether the gleam in the Master's eyes was humor or not. Nevertheless, they twinkled.

"I would leave him alone."

I nodded.

"You needn't worry, I shall be select with my company."

With that he was gone.

WILKINS lit a cigar. For a while he was silent, then he spoke.

"Who are these guys the Master was talking about? They have no records with the police."

It did seem funny. Wilkins evidently had lost part of the conversation. I laughed.

"I am afraid that you have overlooked some of your records. One of them at least has some reputation."

"Which one is that?"

"Mephistopheles."

"Meph—who is he? I never heard of him."

Again I laughed.

"Mephistopheles? Oh, he's not much of anybody. He's merely the devil."

But it did not stagger Wilkins; he was a true detective. He eyed me coldly with a shrewd satisfaction.

"Oh," he commented, "is that all?" A few puffs at his cigar. "I always did want to get a big one."

It occurred to me then that I had not asked Wilkins for an explanation of his presence. How did he happen to be there before myself and the Master? To my question he shrugged his shoulders.

"Orders," he said; "Mr. Warren, orders. That is all I know. I was ordered to the southland and told to remain contentedly in my hotel until I was called for. I was a good deal like a package. And it's the way I felt. I was even beginning to wonder whether they were going to charge storage on me after the extra twenty-four hours. But they didn't wait that long. They called for me a few hours after my arrival."

"Who?"

"The blacks. These fellows, these what-do-you-call-'em Ethiopians."

"Why not call them negroes?"

"Because they ain't. A negro is a man, same as you or I. These fellows are fables."

It did seem laughable. Wilkins with his grim sturdiness was becoming stubborn in his superstition.

"Well," I said, "they brought you here at once, I suppose. Or—"

"They did just that," he interrupted. "They brought me up to the castle door and dumped me. That was two days ago. I had nothing to do but to take possession. I thought at first I was going to get some action, but there ain't no action here—just silence, these here Ethiopian fables, and music."

"Music?"

Wilkins started. It was as though he had said something that he had not intended. Then he nodded.

"Yes. I didn't tell you, did I? I was going to hold that as a surprise."

"What music is this?" I asked.

"It is music out of heaven," he answered.

I laughed.

But Wilkins became emphatic; he suddenly grew serious, almost petulant.

"Don't laugh, Mr. Warren. Please don't. I mean just that. It is nothing else. It can't be. Don't make any light comments until you have heard it. I am a grim old bachelor detective, I know, but I would travel a thousand miles to hear just one strain of the music."

"This is interesting," I said. "Do tell me about it."

"There is not much to tell," answered the detective. "When I landed there was

nothing to do but to take possession and look around. Which is what I did. I roamed about among the nine hundred and ninety-nine rooms of this—"

"Are there that many?" I gasped.

"Yes, and then some. So many that you can't keep track. You get lost, and before you know it you are going into the same ones over again. That is what I did until I played a *Little-Red-Riding-Hood* trick on myself with some pebbles."

"Pebbles?"

"Yes, some pebbles. I went outside and picked up a pocket full. Then whenever I went into a room I dropped a pebble. After that when I looked in a room I looked for a pebble. If I found it I knew I had been there before and was going backward. After a while I came to the south tower, where I heard it."

"Heard it?"

"Yes, this music."

"Oh," I said, "I see. What is it like?"

"Just what I said—out of heaven. A violin."

"Perhaps," I said, "some man—"

But Wilkins shook his head.

"No man ever played like that; it is impossible. You must hear it."

And really I began to feel that it might be so. There was a look in the man's eyes that was almost holy—as if the mere recollection of the thing was inspiration.

"Well," I answered, "I begin to believe you. May we hear it?"

"Come," said Wilkins.

HAD Wilkins told me that the place contained ten thousand rooms I would have believed him, especially after the next few minutes. He led me through a maze and very labyrinth of passages and splendid galleries, long silent, and of stone-cold splendor. On all sides were strange rooms and high-vaulted chambers, spacious and furnished in any one of a thousand styles and colors.

There was a room, evidently, for every period since the days of Caesar. Whoever had conceived it must have had a comprehensive acquaintance with the details and habits of man from the early ages. From the stone and rush chamber of King Arthur, through the elaborate and splendid furnishings of Louis-Quinze, every age was represented. It was unique; an *Aladdin* palace after a style that was original.

Perhaps you have noticed how I have compared so many things about this place to the Arabian Nights. It was because of a queer sense of illusion; because I could not rid myself of the feeling that what I was undergoing could be reamed into pages just as fantastic.

We ascended several floors—I do not know just how many—and turned and turned until I had lost all trace of direction. Then we came to a short, high curved passage. Wilkins turned and I followed. At the end was a great, heavy oaken door, reenforced and studded by numerous bars of heavy brass-colored metal.

What the bars were for I do not know. The door was open. The great flood of light and the stone told me that we had come to one of the rooms in the outer part of the building; the curve in one wall indicating still farther its location. I knew by that curve that we were next to one of the towers. Nevertheless:

"Where are we?" I asked.

"On an upper floor," answered Wilkins. "This wall here is the south tower; the door opposite leads out into one of the corridors of the library. I will open it."

He did, and I looked into a great place that from its peculiar shape made me think of the House of the Sevens. It was a great inverted cone; or, to be precise, a pyramid on its head. From the bottom the room spread out on a series of levels to the very top of the building, giving much the effect of an amphitheater. On each level were innumerable stacks of bookcases.

At the bottom, by the great, heavy, oaken table, was a man. He was old, with a silvery beard, and was reading a great tome by the light that was streaming from the center window. Then I saw. It was the Master.

"I just opened this to show you where we are. Now let me close it. Let us take a chair. I'll open a window. Will you smoke?"

I shook my head. Somehow I could not associate a desire for tobacco with such a place as this. Were it hashish or some essence stolen out of the cave of the *Seven Sleepers,* I would have considered.

"No, not here," I said. "But what of this music?"

Wilkins cocked his feet irreverently on a chair; he lit a great cigar and pulled with astounding vigor. Somehow the posture seemed forced to me, a defiant attitude of nonchalance.

"Just wait," he said, "and listen. This is my own pet spook. He always plays for me. There!"

He stopped. And sure enough, a soft liquid chord floated up as if out of nowhere. It was a violin, played with a tenderness and perfection that was above all ordinary music. Indeed it was not so like music as the symphony of a soul, a spirit pulsating, mellowed into liquid sound, all the feeling, love, anguish, laughter, and devotion in the world. It was not loud—one could scarcely have heard it fifty yards away—and it came out of nowhere. It floated, its softness and timbre were like mellow water, it was clear, liquid, perfection. Perhaps a violinist in his highest moments has a dream like this, the inspiration that he would attain to, but which he ever despairs of attaining.

And yet it followed no order of music that I knew of, no technique; whoever this one was, he was throwing aside all the rules as we know them; there was no ordered tune nor form, it was genius, pure genius and soul, flooding out in a rampant melody of expression. It was, indeed, as Wilkins said—music out of heaven. An angel would play like that; no one else could do so.

It ceased.

Wilkins was sitting in his chair. But his whole attitude had undergone a transformation. His irreverent feet had been withdrawn from the chair before him. His hard, practical features were softened, his eyes glowing with a light that was almost holy. He bowed his head. I held my breath. Never before had I felt so light and hallowed, so near to my Maker.

But there was no more music.

We waited. We were both of us like souls who had approached the portals of heaven, had heard the golden cadence, and were loath to leave it. I shall nevermore doubt Wilkins.

But at length he stood up. He was not the same man who had entered; he was subdued, silent, ennobled.

"Come, Mr. Warren," he said gently. "Let us go."

CHAPTER XL

A TALK WITH THE REBEL SOUL

WE OPENED a door softly. It was the one that led into the library. I could not but note the difference of our departure from our entrance. The music had taken away all our skepticism; the worldliness had been driven from our natures. I wonder if, after all, it is not the secret of communion; may it not be that the bridge across the infinite will be suspended from chords of melody? I am sure I cannot tell; but at that moment I could have believed it.

Wilkins closed the door.

"Well?" he spoke in interrogation.

"How do you account for it?" I asked, returning the question.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't account for it, Mr. Warren. I listen. I have gone beyond accounting."

"You do not think it human?" I asked.

"Did you not hear it?" he returned. "How can it be? It is unlike anything that we know; unlike music as we conceive it."

"Pure inspiration," I assented.

"Exactly. Something higher. The poet's dream."

"I did not know that you read poetry," I said.

"Never read a line of it in my life. But in there"—he pointed—"I would rather be a poet than anything else. That thing gets down in under. There is no doubt of a soul."

Such is the potency of inspiration. There are secret chords and vibrations in us all, which, once touched, are transformation. How can we account for them? It was with me even as it was with Wilkins. There is no doubt of the soul.

We were standing in one of the galleries of the library. Below us, under the soft glow of light, I could see the Master, reading. In all this immense place of condensed and stored-up learning it seemed fitting that he be there; he had the proper dignity to give it color; he was the embodiment of it all; the force that gave it life and direction.

I made an indication to Wilkins.

"Have you told him?" I asked.

He nodded. "Let us go," he said.

We found the Master immersed in a great scroll of old parchment, so old that the print was scarcely legible. It was not print at all, but writing, or, to be more precise, dabs of uncouth and mysterious hieroglyphics. One of the blacks was coming out from between the shelves with another armful. The old man handed him a slip of paper, the other read it and smiled. I noted that this one was older, and of more intelligent bearing than the others, and that his eyes glittered with an obsequious admiration when he looked at the Master. He, too,

was a mute. He returned immediately to the gallery.

The Master looked up. There was an eminent glint of satisfaction in his manner.

"Ah, Walter," he said, "it is you. How do you like the house of silence? I presume Wilkins has been showing you about. It is a wonderful place, is it not?" He made a little gesture with his hand to indicate the uncounted volumes. "I hope you have made the find that I have. The greatest library in the world. I have discovered at last the true librarian." He motioned toward the mute. "A man who says nothing, who knows every one of his books and is a lover; not a watch-dog.

"Pray tell me what you have discovered. There is much in this place for us both to learn."

I nodded. Then I told him of the music; or rather Wilkins did. He repeated the tale just as he had told it to me after dinner.

It pleased the Master. I had thought it might surprise him; but it seems that there is nothing that will disturb him. Nevertheless he stood up from the table.

"It is well," he said. "Let us go up, Wilkins. I, too, would hear this music. Walter, you wait here until we come."

With that they departed.

At the moment the black came up with another armful of books and manuscripts. I noticed that they were brown and timeworn, as if taken out of the ages; even on the outside they had the color and the mystery of things long lost and forgotten. The fellow spread them out on the table and began to arrange them. I picked one up.

It was like no writing that I had ever seen; the ink, or whatever it was, had gone to what was much more than a faded yellow, though it was still dimly legible. It might have been Chinese, but if it was, it was of a kind different from that now written. I turned over the pages. I noted that a great many places had been underlined by the black of a modern pencil. Then I found not a few slips of parchment torn and ripped at the edges, and the name of George Witherspoon written innumerable times.

It was his own handwriting. That I knew for certainty, and for two reasons —first because I knew it; because it grew up alongside of mine from my childhood —we had gone to school together, lived together, and slept in the same bed until we were twenty; secondly, because of the attestation of the torn slips at the margin. It was the habit that no one in the world possessed but George Witherspoon, of tearing off marginal strips of whatever he might be reading and chewing them in abstraction. He would have torn a strip off the Bible; there was nothing too sacred or too valuable to escape him.

But what use could he have had for the literature of such a language? It is strange that, even as I wondered, I should have my answer. A shadow fell on the parchment and I glanced up.

On the opposite side of the table was Witherspoon himself!

I started. In spite of the assurance of the past few hours I was afraid. I had reason both to love him and to fear him. I dropped the parchment in some confusion. He said nothing.

"I WAS just examining this strange manuscript," I remarked. "I was wondering what it could be. What language?"

It was the truth, of course, but I am afraid my speech was rather perfunctory. The other noticed it, a twinkle in his eye.

"Still the same timid Walter, eh; afraid I'll eat you? Just a wee bit afraid?"

He laughed in a teasing sort of way. It was his old manner just a bit; the taunting tone that I had ever been afraid of. Then he turned the conversation to the manuscript. He reached over the table and selected a leaf.

"Not the least in the world," I answered.

He turned down one of the corners.

"It is something I would like to present to every young and aspiring author; to every general; to every one in pursuit of fame."

"What is it?"

"You cannot guess?"

I confessed it.

"Well, I will tell you. It is a page of the Chinese Shakespeare. A page of real work, a page out of immortality. I mean man's immortality. It was given to me by a Chinese wise man."

"I do not understand you," I answered. "I have never heard of a Chinese Shakespeare."

At which he nodded.

"Of course not. Neither has anybody else. Which proves that you do understand me. It is a sample of your fame and what it amounts to. If I was to tell you that this man was once more famous than our own Shakespeare, and even a

greater poet, would you believe me?

"Of course not. Shakespeare has been dead three hundred years, and you say that he will live forever. What are three hundred years compared to eternity? And what is this one? His name was Wan Su. He lived fifteen thousand years ago. For five thousand years—a period as long as your whole history—he was the very pedestal of literary greatness. What is he now? You do not know him. And nobody else. He is gone, and so are his people. And at one time they covered the earth. Fame? Pooh!" He snapped his fingers. "A breath of a second! In fifteen thousand years your Shakespeares and your Napoleons will be forgotten."

Perhaps it was true. I had not thought of it. Mankind surely is good at forgetting. But I denied the truth of his philosophy. It was negation. Even if fame is a will o' the wisp, it leads man onward. Man is a positive creature. So I spoke:

"It may be so just as you say; but I cannot accept it. No philosophy based on what's-the-use will ever do anything for humanity. It is better forgotten before it is thought of. But let me ask you—this writing is dead. How did you acquire it?"

"Very simply," he answered. "The people of whose lives it is an interpretation passed away thousands of years ago. But there were a few struggling, wretched survivors who overlived through the lust of blood and conquest. They withdrew to the deep and inaccessible corners of northwest China. It might interest you to know that they were almost Caucasian.

"But theirs was in no way the greatness that was their fathers'. All they possessed was a dim misty tradition of former greatness, and a few wise men. It was the assiduous zeal of the latter that enabled me to acquire these priceless relics of anti-historical greatness. They have copied and recopied and preserved their literature even to the present generation."

"But," I exclaimed, knowing how such things would be valued, "how did you persuade them to relinquish possession?"

He again placed the sheet upon the table.

"That was easy. In such cases there is always a time and a place for seizure. I had heard of these manuscripts, which, you understand, are not the original—not even the old Chinese could conquer time like that—but exact copies handed down by their wise men. I determined that I should have them. I aided and abetted a great Chinese bandit in an insurrection. I held him under my control and insisted on the whole library."

"And he delivered?"

"All. Except perhaps a few volumes that became scattered by the wayside. They will be picked up in time."

ARE you surprised at my wonder? I had known this man as a child. He was controlling in mysterious manner many things to his will, even rebellions in far-off China. For the sake of a few books he would start a revolution, perhaps overturn an empire.

I could only say:

"You have a wonderful collection."

"You like it?"

"What I have seen. The whole place, the palace, is an elaborate conception of genius. To me it is like the palace of *Aladdin*. I presume it has the forty windows. Who built it?"

There was a twinkle in his eye.

"Perhaps my jinnee. The jinnee of the lamp."

Of course he was talking figuratively, so I answered him in kind.

"Then," I said, "you do have forty windows; the thirty-nine and the one unfinished."

To my surprise he nodded, and I saw that he was serious.

"It is even so," he answered. "There is the fortieth window, or to be precise, there is one thing unfinished."

"And this?" I asked.

"Is myself. Like *Aladdin,* I have called in the artificers and the great magician. I have talked with the Master. He insisted on the undertaking. He knows the penalty that impends with failure. I allowed him to dispatch Wilkins on ahead.

"You came with the Master. I want to say that you do not seem to measure up to the standard. Before you were started you plunged after death headforemost. I had to save you. I shall not do it always."

I understood, and I spoke my thoughts.

"Then," I said, "this thing, this one on the car, was the Thing of Evil."

He nodded.

"And he is in this house?" I asked.

"Exactly."

"Then," I said, "perhaps you may tell me who he is. And who you are. What is it all about?"

He shook his head.

"That I cannot. Because I do not know

But I can tell you one thing—I am the only one that stands between this one and promiscuous slaughter."

"You do not know what he is?"

"Not at all."

"But," I said, "yourself. You surely can tell me that."

He smiled. It seemed to me like acquiescence.

"Perhaps," he said, "you would not believe me if I told you."

"I would believe anything," I answered, "anything."

"Then," he said, "I will tell you. It is this—I am the only man on earth."

I smiled at this, it was such a ridiculous assertion.

"No doubt," I said; "no doubt. But if this is so—pray let me ask you, what am I?"

"An object."

It was astounding, but somehow it did not seem like impertinence. Had anybody else called me this I would have been insulted. It was much as if he had called me a bug. An object! Yet after all there was that about it that told me even then that he might have some basis for the assertion.

"Thank you," I defended. "I choose to regard myself as a man."

He laughed merrily.

"No, Walter," he said, "you are not a man, and never will be. You are objective. You have no control over your life and actions. You are a victim of circumstance. You are the slave of body, of gout, politics, finance, and influenza. Your only title to the assumption is your egotism.

"You roll along in a rut of predestination. You excuse yourself by your religion, fatalism, and your philosophy. You are an animal grown wise, a lump of flesh with intelligence, an object."

I thought hard for a moment. All that he spoke might be so. What he said generally carried conviction.

"And the people of the streets?" I asked. "The unaccounted millions teeming and beetling over the earth's wide surface—do you place them in the same classification?"

"Certainly," was his answer. "All of them, every one; mere objects, animated, to be sure, and with a bit of intelligence, but with no control."

"You are the only man? Pray—"

"Because I am my own master," he said. "I am mind, not body. I am not objective. My will and volition come from inside entirely. My body is but the vehicle of my spirit, a machine and not one thing else, to be treated well while I have use for it, and then to be cast aside.

"I control it! It answers perfectly to my mandates. It is in perfect correlation. I am subjective. I am lord of myself. I am not a victim of circumstance. I laugh at fate. I am my own master."

Such a man! But I began to get some glimmering of his meaning.

"Tell me," I exclaimed; "tell me, you can do anything?"

"Almost anything. I can overcome time and distance, I can annihilate space. I am master of volition, I am subjective. I first and others after. Objects are mere externals. I live in spirit, but still in body. What is it?"

Then the inspiration.

"If you are so powerful—I would see Roselle."

"Ah—"

And at the word I sank in my chair in astonishment. It was done so suddenly, almost to the instant of my speaking. He did it without quivering an eyelash. I could see him still standing on the opposite side of the table.

IT WAS very astonishing. The whole room went to darkness, and I saw. It was plain, almost as the real flesh and action. It was Roselle. She was the same beautiful girl, only slightly older, her skin was as clear as ever and as smooth as the softness of a rose. She was smiling.

It was a simple picture of a great sunlit room. On the floor was a Persian kitten. Even as I looked Roselle jumped up playfully and rolled a soft ball of yarn at her plaything. The kitten sprang. I could almost hear the girl laughing. She gathered the kitten up in her hands, patted it, and cuddled it in her lap. Then she resumed her sewing, or whatever it was that she was engaged on.

That was all. It had passed like the flitting of a vision. I had seen Roselle. There was not a single doubt in my mind as to its reality. When I looked across at the other he was still standing beside the table.

But he was not the same Witherspoon, the eyes of this one were mellow and tender; burning with hallowed love light. And he was subjective. At the moment I thought, and perhaps rightly, that even if he was it was after all merely allied to the objective like the rest of human beings and mortals.

For some time he was silent. Then he turned. His chest heaved. There had come over him a change; a strange and indescribable tenderness was in his manner. I spoke my thoughts.

"You love her," I exclaimed, "after all, you are objective. You are even as ourselves."

His answer might be a part of his philosophy.

"True love, Walter," he said, "is not objective. It is the life of the soul."

That I could not answer. After all, I did not know whether to give it a subjective or an objective definition. Whatever it was there was no doubting its effect; the George Witherspoon before me was not the George Witherspoon of a few minutes previous. He was more noble, and of a bearing to inspire confidence, not fear. But there were a great many things that I would ask him.

"How do you do this?" I questioned. "You have designated yourself as the King of Thieves. Is it true?"

Somehow that question seemed to amuse him.

"Have you any doubt, Walter, as to my kinship? Would you care to witness? What would you have?"

"I do not understand you."

"Undoubtedly not. But let me show you. Now. On the side wall."

How he did it I have, of course, no way of telling. But again a vision was shot into the distance. It was as if I were looking into an office. As though, indeed, we had entered and were sitting at the table on the opposite side of which was sitting a gentleman clad in a neat gray business sult.

He was a man of sharp features, close, covetous thin lips, and eyes of ophidian blackness. He was a kind I could not like. An office-boy came in with a tray full of mail. He attacked it with a sinister alertness.

"Who is this man?" I asked.

"In the language of the street, Walter, he is what we would term a champion of the double cross. A gambler without honor. He is one of the kind who have a predilection for transforming their best friends into bench sleepers and night-watchmen."

"I see," I said; "and what has this to do—"

The scene changed even as I spoke. It was the same office and the same man. Only the man was dead. By his side was a blue-barreled automatic. A tiny wisp of smoke was curling to the ceiling. On the wall were painted three black crosses.

"And this?" I asked. "What does it mean?"

"It is all there before you," was the answer. "The triple cross. The fellow outstripped himself. He was a rascal and a menace to society; but he had brains, and could keep behind the law. It is one of my recreations to seek these men out and to clean them. It is where I get my title and a great deal of my wealth."

It was good to hear him say that. It did not seem like stealing.

"Then you are not a thief? You never robbed a poor man."

He laughed; his answer was epigrammatic.

"I never choked a widow in my life."

CHAPTER XLI

WILKINS DOES SOME READING

THAT lightened my feelings. He was using his unparalleled powers not for straight criminal aggrandizement, but as a sort of retributory justice, where, after all, it might be needed. Indeed, viewed in the plain light of ethics it might be condoned as not verging into the criminal at all.

I saw it plainly. With his unlimited means it was easy for him to seek out the malefactors who lurked behind the obscurity of the law's technicalities to carry nefarious war on their fellows. He was a sort of a masculine Nemesis who presided over their destruction. I reflected that this was a trait characteristic of his childhood.

When we were children he had always played fair; he had ever scorned a cheater. It was not until the change that he had gone to wickedness and to absolute selfishness. It was good to know this now. Even with his power, he was wicked where he could do the most good. I had no doubt of the reality of the picture. There was no question of his power —it was uncanny.

And as a man of business I could not refrain from a consideration of the monetary purport. Did he confiscate the wealth of the rascals whom he ruined? No doubt he did. It was undoubtedly the source from which he had amassed such an untold fortune. It was stolen, and through the interpretation he drew his title, the King of Thieves.

"Money," he said when I asked him.

"Money. Yes, I have considerable. This old mansion is full of it. It would delight your financial eyes to behold it. Some day you may see. But when you do you must be careful; it is the tribute of the devil."

"The devil?"

"Yes, Walter. And you must be careful."

"And he is in this house?"

"You have said it," was his answer, "and a more uncanny devil than ever stalked through a dream of *Faustus*."

I would have answered, but at that moment I suddenly became aware that we were not alone. I turned and discovered the Master and Wilkins standing beside us—I could not tell how long they had been there. But it was evident from the eyes of the detective that he, too, had witnessed the scene on the side wall. There was a wholesome respect and admiration in the critical scrutiny of his eyes; an awe that was amusing. It was so totally out of the run of his experience; he was so practical and real.

Then I remembered.

"Mr. Witherspoon—Mr. Wilkins."

You couldn't jar Wilkins. He stepped forward with his stubby hand extended.

"Yes," he greeted. "Glad to know you, Mr. Rebel Soul; glad to know you."

George Witherspoon took the hand. His eyes twinkled. The plain, blunt honesty of the other seemed to please him.

"So this is Wilkins? If I remember, Wilkins and I have done a little jogging about of our own, have we not? Is it still the intention to arrest me?"

But the irrepressible detective shook his head.

"Not," he said, "until I see a blacksmith."

The eyes of the other sparkled with understanding.

"And why the blacksmith?" he asked.

"To forge me a pair of tongs," said Wilkins.

At which George Witherspoon went into a burst of his old-time laughter. When he had subsided he placed a good-natured hand on the officer's shoulder.

"Not a bad idea at that. You go get them—they may come in handy."

However, Wilkins was serious. The Master had seated himself beside me and was content for once to let the other do his talking. I smiled, for it was all so enigmatical to Wilkins, whose straight, hard sense refused to revert from its training. He went straight to his point.

"I want to ask you, Mr. Rebel Soul, who it is you have up there in the tower?"

Witherspoon smiled.

"You have heard him?" he asked.

"I have. We all have. And I want to ask you if you have a trained angel?"

At which Witherspoon again went into laughter. I could see that he liked Wilkins.

"That is for you to find out. The walls will not be thick enough to resist you. That is what you came for. You are on the great adventure."

Which ended it. Shortly afterward, with an admonition to enjoy ourselves, Witherspoon departed.

It was but a few hours of the evening and I had but begun my exploration. The great library alone would suffice for days. I was almost as eager as the Master to delve into its recesses and to unearth its treasures. I have always been first of all a book-worm.

But I was not to be alone. In a few minutes I discovered that I was being shadowed by the sturdy Wilkins. For once he was bashful and followed me about the shelves with the furtive awe of a child. Occasionally he would draw down a book for an awed and clumsy perusal. In such a mass of learning he was helpless, and there is nothing so pitiful as an unreading materialist among a mass of books. Finally I went to his assistance.

"What is it, Wilkins?" I asked. "Can I help you?"

"I—I think so, Mr. Warren," he answered. "I think so. I would ask that black-fable of a librarian, but what's the use? And I can't fish it out myself. If I could read these books here I'd sit up for a professor. They're way above my head. What I want is the children's department."

I smiled.

"The children's department? And why the children's department? Surely your appreciation would call for something heavier."

But he shook his head.

"No," he said, "I want just that; the fairy tales. I want to get a line on this case. My mind is in a rut, and I am going to get it out. I am looking for this story about this *Meph*—what's-his-name that we were talking about at dinner."

I chuckled.

"Oh, I see. You mean *Mephistopheles*. You will find that in *'Faust'* though it is hardly a juvenile. It is a German work. Perhaps we can find a translation."

I CALLED the Master. Sure enough, at the old man's behest, the black librarian brought to us the book he had asked for. In fact he did more; because when Wilkins left us he had under his arm not only a copy of Goethe's *"Faust,"* but likewise a copy of the *"Frankenstein"* of Mrs. Shelley.

It was some hours later before I again thought of him. In fact, just before retiring, I called one of the mutes, or black fables, as Wilkins called them, and made an indication that I would like to see the detective.

It was surprising, and almost droll. I was led to one of the most sumptuous chambers of the whole palace. The bed was a canopied affair that would have befitted Napoleon; the coverlets were costly imported silk of intricate design, and in the midst, in bachelor ease, was the pink pajamaed figure of the detective.

It was almost a shock to see him. Somehow I could not imagine Wilkins in pink pajamas. He was just beginning to need a shave. He was smoking one of his black cigars and reading. He blew a smoke-cloud when he saw me.

"Hello, Object!" he greeted.

"Why Object?" I asked.

"Isn't that what the Rebel Soul called you? And I'm another, only I'll define it. I'm a fine-looking object, ain't I? How do you like my bedroom?"

The look in my eyes was perhaps enough of expression, for he went on.

"I chose the best, Mr. Warren. I can sleep just like a king, and feel like one. I've been reading this Dutchman's story."

"You mean Goethe."

"Yes, only it sounds more to me like goat with a cloth on. Goath, Goethe. But I presume you're right. Whatever he was, he ain't no fool. I've just got well started."

"Then after all," I asked, "you think it may have some bearing?"

"Surely. This fellow wrote it for a fairy tale. Had he known George Witherspoon he would have been writing history."

"Then you think—"

"Sure, just that. This *Mephisto.* He and George Witherspoon are the one and only."

It did sound ridiculous, but after all it was only natural that once he got started the practical Wilkins should swing to the opposite extreme of the arc of reason.

"Perhaps," I ventured with a smile. "But how about *Faustus?* May it not be that he has sold himself—"

But Wilkins interrupted; his answer was almost snapping.

"Who? That guy? Not on your tintype. I should say not. He ain't selling nothing. And if he was, I'd hate to buy it. He's the real *I,* that guy; the whole thing—and then some."

It was startling, of course, but after all a certain sequence followed not long after that induced me almost to the same opinion.

CHAPTER XLII

IN THE SOUTH TOWER

FOR a few days I saw next to nothing of the detective. You could not have dragged him away from those books with a tractor. I was left alone to my explorations. I saw the Master, to be sure, in the library, but he had gone again into silence.

He and George would sit in long discussions, but when I discovered that it had to do with that old Chinese, and that half of their conversations were in an Oriental singsong language, I fell back to my own resources.

I spent hours and days in curious exploration. There was a mystery and a secret about the place that would not unravel. Forever I was finding some new passage or set of chambers at which to marvel. The place was a fascinating jumble of everything on earth. One could have threaded and rethreaded through it a year without making much more than a beginning.

Often I would go up to the south tower and listen. I could never forget that music and its inspiration. When I felt lonely and out of the world and afraid, as I often did, I would go there. And it never once failed me. It was like all the goodness, all the virtue and all the hope in the world centered into melody. One could forget almost anything in the strength of its inspiration. It made one feel that whatever the meaning of all this mystery and shadow there was at the center a pure heart burning.

It was on one of these intermittent explorations that I at last discovered a stairway. It was in one of the rooms on the upper floor of the building. The door was open, and I had entered. It was bare but for a beautiful green carpet and a small, oaken table, and in one corner a narrow metal stair that led up to the ceiling.

With an exclamation I knew it for one of the things I looked for. It led up to the roof of the building. It was a way out into the sunlight. In a moment I had mounted and unbarred the little trap and stepped out into the open.

Did you ever come suddenly through a bunch of underbrush to the top of a mighty mountain? Do you remember your exclamation? For hours you have toiled through the foliage with a sense of isolation. You long to get outside, to be on top, to feel the sense of mastery at the summit. Then you can understand my emotions.

I was here at last, with the thrill of freedom. All the mystery and question of the building was beneath me; I was in the sunlight breathing the open air of distance. There lay the same blue sky, the same far-reaching ocean, the same wooded mountains. It was all real and lifelike. I could see men, real men, working in the distance; an automobile driven by a man was coming up the highway. I could not but wonder at the completeness of the isolation, like nothing that one could conceive of, like the depth of ages, a gulf of time separating us from the present. And yet, in the midst of all—men, life, love, and action all about us.

I examined my surroundings. I was standing on a floor almost level, though sloping slightly to allow for the draining of water. It was a parallelogram with four circles at the corners, lifted perhaps about two feet above the main floor, and which I knew to be the towers. The roof itself was of stone, well mortared; a few vents and chimneys in the center, and against one of the vents a ladder that might have been left by the builders. I stepped over to the south tower, ascended the extra two feet and looked over the rampart into the perfumed garden.

Below me was a mass of semitropical profusion, myriad colored and giving off aromatic odors. The beds about the building were in full blossom, the lawns like velvet emerald and the trees soughing with the soft breeze of the ocean. It was like waking up in the spring-time. For a time I was drowsy with contentment; gazing at the beauty, the garden, the landscape, and below the height a bay that cut into a neck of land from the ocean. I watched the white sails of the yachts, and on the other side of the strip of blue a beach teeming with people. A summer hotel stood out white against the background. I thought I heard music.

Music? Yes, but it was not such as comes from a summer resort. It was my own musician. I remembered then that it was on the south tower that I was standing.

It was not until it had died away and the shadows were growing long that I opened the trap and descended to dinner. For some days now I had been alone. The Master was engrossed with Witherspoon and some secret; and Wilkins with *Mephisto.*

I had been left to my own resources. But on this night I found the detective; he was waiting, and, no doubt as a reaction to his silence, was unusually loquacious.

"Well," he said, "I have finished it."

"Goethe's 'Faust'?"

"Yes, and his *Mephistopheles,* and his *Margaret.*"

"You like it?"

"A great piece of writing. And I might say imagination."

"It is," I answered; "but with no bearing on life outside of its poetry and its allegorical interpretation."

"Its which? I didn't see that."

I went into explanation. Wilkins nodded.

"I understand you now. That was Goethe's intention. He didn't know as much as you or I do. I have always been cold and practical and hard-headed, Mr. Warren, and I have never been superstitious. Had anybody told me about this case I would not have believed them. I would have proved out of common sense that such things could never happen."

"And now?"

"What would you have? I have eyes, have I not, and ears? And I am not such a fool but what I can use them. I would believe anything."

"You are ready to accept a literal interpretation. Do you still rate George as the *Mephisto?*"

He nodded.

"Why not? He comes nearer that than any other. He is not *Faust. Faust* was passive, a mere plaything. This Witherspoon is the whole works."

I had already, of course, related to Wilkins all that I knew of the Thing of Evil. I was convinced that that one was the center of it all, the real one that was at the source and the beginning.

I DID not relish the idea of George as *Mephisto.* I had faith in him; he was in my lights as true as I was. I was like

Roselle, I had never wavered. Neither could I incline to superstition. I, like the Master, was confident that when all was stripped away, when the case was bared of weirdness, we would find at the bottom, after all, material facts and sequence. It could not possibly be supernatural.

"Then," I asked, "how do you account for this evil one, this black monster that lurks somewhere in the building?"

"He is in here?"

"He is."

"That is good. Mr. Warren, I don't believe that I have to account for him. That is for George Witherspoon."

"You mean—"

"Just this: That George Witherspoon is it, and the other is his puppet."

At that moment I disagreed. I had reason to feel a certain confidence in my opinion; but it was not to be enduring. It was only a short time later that I was almost as much convinced as Wilkins.

It was the next day, shortly after the noon hour. I had disclosed to the detective the secret of the stairway. It was one of the things that his keen eyes had not discovered. Now that he had labored through his "Faust," he was keen to continue with his investigations. When I mentioned the ladder on the roof his eyes lit with a sudden inspiration.

"I have an idea, Mr. Warren. Did you ever notice, when outside in the grounds, that there are windows in that tower?"

"But no doors on the inside," I said.

"Exactly. But there are windows, and one of them looks out on the roof of the portico."

I nodded. I had noted it several times.

"What do you propose to do?" I asked.

At the question his eyes sparkled with anticipation.

"Do? Why, can't you guess? Do you imagine that I am going to pass up my first chance to see an angel? I have heard him. Now I am going to try to see him. It is simple—the ladder is a piece of fortune. All we have to do is to ascend to the roof and lower it to the portico. In two snaps we can look in at the window. I am going to see what he looks like. Come along."

I did. In a short time we were standing on the stone floor in the sunlight. The ladder was still where I had seen it. Wilkins picked it up with manifest satisfaction. It was long and would evidently reach to the portico.

But it was heavy. The wind was blowing and it was difficult to handle. So I took one end. It was grimy and covered with soot, and smeared me with filth. If I was not so dainty and unused to exertion I would not perhaps have noticed it. It certainly did not bother Wilkins. In a moment we had carried it over to the tower. I looked at my companion. At his direction I assisted in turning it about and laying it crosswise on the tower.

Wilkins nodded with satisfaction. I stepped over to him as he pulled out one of his black cigars and lit it.

"Some view up here, Mr. Warren, isn't it?"

"It is," I said, "it is. A splendid panorama. The whole country, the sea, the sky, the distance."

He had his sturdy legs apart—it was a way he had of standing, especially when watching.

"Yes, it is. Just like daylight."

Somehow his words had the intonation of one just emerging from out of the darkness.

I did not answer. I was brushing off my clothes; I had taken out a handkerchief and was snapping off the dust and cobwebs.

"I am afraid you will find that lost labor," he commented; "we are going down the ladder, you know, and climbing down a wall like this is hardly a silk handkerchief job."

"Who, I? I had not thought of going down myself."

"Certainly; don't you wish to see the angel?"

Then we heard the music. For a moment Wilkins stood stock-still, his whole attitude in attention. Then he whispered:

"Now, Mr. Warren, easy!"

I did as I was told. Together, as quietly as we could, we slid the ladder over the parapet. It was not as easy as the telling, because it was heavy, and more so when the center of equilibrium was over the side wall. But Wilkins was sturdy; by climbing to the rungs he succeeded in landing it on the portico. Luckily, we made no noise.

He turned to me.

"I'm going over, Mr. Warren. If I make any motion to you, get on the ladder and come after; don't be afraid. I will not call unless there is something you should see.

"Now for the angel."

CHAPTER XLIII

THE QUEST FOR THE MUSICIAN

WITH that he climbed over, and rung by rung made the descent. As I watched him I could not but comment that he must have done this thing before. He was a man of hazardous profession. I wondered how I, with my inaptitude for climbing, would perform on such a flimsy stairway. He reached the bŏttom.

The tower was high, and, as I was directly above him, I could not see more than the top of his head and his shoulders. I recall that he had on a black derby hat, which, setting squarely in the center of his figure, gave to him a grotesque appearance, something like a queer and ugly bug. He hesitated for but a moment. The music was still playing.

It must be remembered that he was directly beneath me. I was forced to climb a bit and lean over the parapet in order to see him at all. This made me a little dizzy, but I was curious to know what was to come of our little adventure.

He crept down slowly and cautiously. I could see his hand pressing against the wall, and at length see him peeking in at the window with great stealth.

At last he looked up; his finger was crooked in indication for me to go down, and he stepped over to the foot of the ladder. I needed no second bidding. In a moment I had let myself over the wall and was on the flimsy ladder. I don't know why ladders are made so frail. When I looked down on the diminutive Wilkins and the gulf below me I experienced a gulping and sickening nausea, and a desire to leap. It seemed so easy.

I closed my eyes to recover control and clung on tightly. I had ever been weak in body, and never much of a climber.

"In this house you have the solution of the whole mystery of the Rebel Soul. *Faust, Mephistopheles, Frankenstein*— There is analogy between George Witherspoon's story and each of theirs"

I thought at that moment what a fool I was to trust myself on such a ladder. To make things worse the wind began blowing. I could feel myself swaying in an incredible arc, though I suppose it was not much more than a vibration. I clung on with frightened desperation.

But at length the vertigo left me. I don't suppose it continued more than a few seconds. I began to descend. You can imagine just how carefully I felt for each succeeding rung—I believe that my finger-prints are still on the sides of that ladder. At last I felt the abrupt halt of a floor beneath my feet. I had reached the portico. I looked up at Wilkins, and noticed a piece of steel in his hand.

"What are you going to do with that?" I demanded.

"Do? What would I do? I'm going to jimmy that window."

Well, I could not stop him. Before I could make any further comment he was plying his craft; which, from the way in which he went at it, is half-burglar. It was not the first window he had ever opened. I wondered whether the one inside might not stop him. But there was no opposition. In a jiffy he had raised the sash and climbed inside.

"All right," he whispered. "Here, let me have your hand."

We were in a round room exactly the same size as the tower. It was a combination of library, studio, and music-room. On an easel was an unfinished canvas of a Pacific sunset. I am not a judge of art, but if true art is naturalness this was the work of no uncommon hand. On the table were a palette, a number of brushes and other appurtenances of the profession.

On another table were a number of musical instruments, most of them violins. Wilkins eyed them critically, one of them he picked up; from several bows reposing side by side he made a selection. I had no idea what he was going to do. He closed one eye, as if he were trying to remember something out of the years. Then he rasped out "Yankee Doodle."

I say rasped because that is just what it was. Wilkins nodded.

"That's a Strad," he commented.

"A Strad? How do you know?" I exclaimed. "I—"

"Why," he said, "can't you hear? Where are your ears? The timbre. Did you not notice the beautiful sound?"

I have never seen a Stradivarius, nor heard one; and, of course, I could not judge. I could only nod.

"But this musician? Why did we come—"

My companion placed the instrument in its place. I think there was just a little longing in his eyes—there was music in his soul, even if he could not get it out with his fingers.

"That's right," he said, "the musician. We must find him. Once I get him I'm going to make him sit down and play for me the rest of my life."

But just here a new difficulty presented. The round room was about thirty feet across; on one side was a circular, iron stair that led both up and down. Had the mysterious occupant ascended? At first Wilkins suggested that we go in opposite directions, with the implication that one or the other would be sure to find him.

But at that I demurred. I would much rather stay with him. I am not exactly brave, and though this musician looked anything but vicious, I would much rather enter his presence in the company of one that I knew was flesh and blood.

"All right," said Wilkins, "what'll it be: up, down; up, down; up—"

"Down," I said.

"All right, down she is."

WILKINS took the lead. The room below had no windows; the walls were papered but sheer, without the least trace of an opening. An electric light was glowing faintly. Apparently it was a sort of dining-room. On a table in the center reposed the remains of a meal not long finished. Wilkins turned over a few fragments and sniffed with satisfaction.

"Well, that's one comfort."

"What?"

"He eats just like you or I. He's human. I can forbear the angel; long as he's got the music. If he's a man I can hold him."

"But he's not here."

"We'll find him, never fear."

I looked about.

"Shall we go up or down?"

The detective pointed to the stair.

"She goes down, don't she? That's the way we started—we'll go to the bottom. We've got plenty of time for the top."

But this time when we descended we ran into the dark. I believe it was the blackest place I ever entered; it was dark with that intensity that borders on nothingness and imbues in one a sort of con-

ception of pure space. I was compelled to hold one hand on my companion's shoulder to keep my courage. I like daylight.

"Hang it!" Wilkins exclaimed.

"What is it?" I whispered.

"We're up against something. I bumped my nose. Wait till I get a light. There now!"

He pulled out a pocket flash-lamp and turned a round glow of light before him. It was a door. It was heavy and wooden. Wilkins tried the knob. It was locked.

"We will have to go back," I whispered.

"Who? Us? Not on your tintype. This is right where we go. Locked out, eh! Here, hold this light!"

I took the lamp while he fumbled in his pocket. In a moment he had something in his hand and was working at the lock. In this hole I felt creepy; I could hear something creaking on the stairs above me; I think I heard some one pounding.

They spoiled a good burglar when they made Wilkins a detective. The barred door was only an incentive. He worked with eagerness and anticipation; in no time he had it open. The light that flashed over his shoulder bored its way through a long, low passage.

"Gimme the light," he said. "It's getting interesting. Now come on."

I would much rather have gone back; but, nevertheless, I followed. My bravery was of the common variety—I would follow when others did the leading; I did not wish to be called a coward. You can depend upon it that I clung close to Wilkins.

It was much like a cave. It had a musty, dripping feeling; the air seemed deadened, but for all that moist and laden. Perhaps it was the absolute absence of ventilation. I noticed that the floor was of stone and that the ceiling was curved; a sort of moss was growing on the side wall. When I looked back I had the feeling that we were the only ones on earth. Why are such strange passages ever constructed?

But there was one comfort. That was the light. As long as that held out we could at least keep some sense of direction. I began to speculate on flashlight batteries and the length of their life. Wilkins was walking on his toes; I was careful to follow his example. Then he held his hand out behind him. I grasped it.

The light went out!

CHAPTER XLIV

THE EVIL ONE

IT WAS only the pressure of my companion's hand that kept me from exclaiming, I was so disappointed. I had never known that a ray of light could have such value. I started to whisper; but the detective placed his hand rudely over my mouth. I thought I heard him breathing "Fool!"

I could do nothing but obey him. When he pressed me against the wall I made zeal to press even closer. He held my hand; I could feel the pressure of reassurance that he gave, and I squeezed back as an indication that I understood him. Which I did not.

He crept cautiously along the side wall, holding my hand and leading me behind him. I began to see dimly. Was I becoming accustomed to the darkness? No, it was a light, a faint glow ahead of us. We crept up closer.

The passage down which we were stealing had opened into a room. It was a place of some dimensions; I could not distinguish just how large. It was faintly lighted by a small globe hanging in what apparently was the center. In any other place on earth it would still have been semi-darkness; in contrast to the passage it was like the full sweep of the sunshine.

Wilkins halted suddenly. The grip on my hand tightened, it had a world of meaning. We heard a sound.

Never shall I forget that sound. I am a banker. There is one sound which, to a man's ears, is ever like music, one never forgets it: it is the curse, and the one thing that can send a tingling thrill through the veins of the coldest. It was money. It was gold!

I listened.

There was not a doubt of it. I could hear the metallic clatter of falling metal; it had the heavy, distinctive ring of the precious mineral. And it was not that of single pieces, but handfuls; some one was literally shoveling gold!

I caught my breath. The sound ceased. Even as it did the light went out and a door creaked heavily.

"Now," said Wilkins.

We stepped boldly into the room. Somehow my withering fear had left me. It was as if I had been charged with an electric life and eagerness. There was a

magnetic current that thrilled with the lure of gold. My companion turned on the boring light of his pocket-lamp to locate our bearings and directions.

As he did so I caught a flitting transitory vision that was startling. The light lit up a gleam of metal, alternated with numerous partitions. A large room, lined on all sides with bins of solid concrete, and each bin full. One glance told us. In this place was more gold than hardware.

Wilkins brought the shaft of light back to the place of starting, turning it into the bin that was nearest. I started. It was full. Full! Stacked high with eagles and double eagles! The blaze of its glitter was almost burning. I could only gasp. I could hear my companion mutter.

"Well, what do you know about that!"

For a moment I could not do more than stand there. I knew its value, I understood the worth and potency of gold. In this room was the wealth of a Midas. Cesare Borgia's crime-stained and couvetous hoard was but a mite beside it. A room that was overflowing.

Gold! Gold! Enough to buy a nation. I yielded to its yellow lure and ran my arms into it. I picked up handfuls of twenties; I let them run through my fingers.

"Whose, whose," I asked; "whose can it be?"

I remember Wilkins' answer.

"Whose? Whose can it be but *Mephisto's!*"

It was one of the strangest moments that I have ever known, and I have known several very strange ones. It was a dream that all bankers have of unlimited surplus. I was in a glamoured daze and ecstatic exhilaration. Such wealth was baleful.

But it was not so with Wilkins. It was to him but so much hardware—wonderful, to be sure, and of great value, but nothing that he could worship. It was but a metallic adjunct to the mystery. So much for training.

"Come," he said, "Mr. Warren. We must explore the place. After all, this is only gold; it is not what we came for. Hello!"

The light went out with a suddenness that could foretell only disaster. It was a moment when one acts on instinct. I felt the sheer strength of Wilkins' muscle, and I leaped to the suggestion. A hot whir, a burning thing, twanged past my forehead; my ear was seared as if it had been dipped in flame. I fell sprawling in the bed of gold, rolling in confused and helpless terror. What was it?

The room was a perfect roar of battle. I could see Wilkins, between flashes, pumping away at his automatic. I could hear him running along the flagging, swearing. Then silence.

I did not care for all the gold in Christendom. I wanted to get out, to get away, to go home. At length Wilkins returned.

"Where are you, Mr. Warren?" he whispered. "Are you hurt?"

I was something—I did not know what. There was something wrong with my ear; it had a sort of painful stinging numbness. I held my hand up in question. It was wet and warm. It was blood! But it was not that that made me afraid—it was Wilkins.

"What was it?" I whispered. "What was it? What did you shoot at?"

"Good Lord, Warren, didn't you see it? It was Death itself."

"Death?"

"Yes, or the devil. Sure, sure, it was the devil. Come, get out of here; we've got to get him."

But I crouched down in the bin. I dreaded to come out with such things running about in the darkness. But I did not wish Wilkins to leave me; I had to lean on some one.

"But," I said, "are you not afraid?"

"Afraid? Afraid? What are you saying? Yes, maybe I will be, after I get him. But come on. Man, would you lose a chance like this?"

I would not, for I could not. He seized me by the collar.

"Now, then," he whispered, "follow me. There is no one going to hurt you. It is only—"

"Only the devil," I chattered, and brought up falteringly and fearful, behind him.

But thank goodness there was no more of this devil. We searched every corner. There seemed no way of escape. We had both forgotten about the musician. Once only I thought rather grimly that we two who had sought an angel had wound up so soon by hunting for the devil. I wanted to get out of the darkness. Wilkins was too grimly brave; a man is all right when he doesn't lead a good man into danger.

I wanted daylight.

AT LAST we discovered a door. Wilkins pried it open. Once more we were in one of those passages of chaos.

But now he was in a hurry. In spite of the fact that we were rushing into certain death, he almost dragged me in his haste. It was a place much like the other. He used no caution. Verily I believe that bravery can border on madness.

Then suddenly we came to a door. For a moment I had some respite and safety while he labored with the lock. We were at the end of the passage! We had passed no one. Therefore we were safe for the time.

But I did not like the dark. It was fearful, treacherous, ominous. My ear was bleeding. I began to feel faint; I think it was from loss of blood. I don't think it was fear. It was so dark behind us. I looked back; it was dreadful. What if—

I whispered, "Can you get it open?"

"Just a minute; hold the light. There. now let me. Heavens, can't you hold it still? There now—well, for the love of Pete! Here, let me have it."

I passed him the light.

I don't know why he did it, but he held the flash square in my eyes and gazed down into my features.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" Then he said, very kindly: "Well, do the best that you can, Mr. Warren. I'll try to hurry. Perhaps on the other side we will find some daylight."

We did. I was never so glad of anything in my life. I believe I would have gone mad had I remained in that dank, clammy darkness much longer. I can be brave when I have to, but it's got to be in daylight.

We were at the foot of an iron stairway much like the one we had descended. At first I thought it the same, but when we had ascended to the next floor and discovered a room of wild disorder—books and papers on the floor and every indication of confusion—we knew it for another.

Wilkins put up his flash-light. He nodded at the disordered furniture.

"Rather unkempt, eh, for the trim and well-ordered house of silence. Looks like excitement. Most likely this is the north tower. The other we thought contained an angel. I wonder if this one houses his nibs? It looks like it."

I did not answer because he had started up the stairway.

"Come along," he said. "I think that he went this way."

The next room was much like the one we had entered in the south tower. It had windows. It was a relief to look out of them at the fresh, green landscape. The fog was just sweeping into the grounds. So we could not have been long under the building. But it was long enough, I can assure you. I shall never go there again.

We found our bearings. We were looking out on the roof of the portico; against the opposite tower we could see the ladder down which we had commenced our journey. But that was all. The room was much like the one that we had left. In a corner was a case full of books; in this tower there were books wherever you looked. Wilkins picked one up. It might have been written in Greek or Sanskrit.

"Huh," he greeted. "Well, come on, we don't get anything here."

The next one was more encouraging. Though it was round like the others it boasted a door to break the monotony. A desk graced the center; a table, some whisky in a bottle, a number of pens and some red ink stood on it.

Wilkins inclined his head attentively; he dipped some on his finger, spread it on the paper, smelled it, and nodded satisfaction.

"It's him, all right—the Old Boy himself, as sure as I'm a good-looking bachelor."

I had gone just about far enough. There are some scents that can get entirely too hot. I had already had some taste of the other's effectiveness. In a broken mirror I had a terrible glimpse of my features. The side of my face was blood-stained; the other was white as powder; my eyes lighted with a strange, terrifying weirdness; my ear was cut.

I wanted to get out and to get out quickly. I was content to stay in the main part of the building; the towers could retain their secret; I even believe I lost my love for gold. I shut my eyes on the recollection. I pointed to the door.

"Let us go. Let us get out of here!"

"You are afraid?"

"Yes."

I think Wilkins' eyes were kind. Perhaps he understood. I have too strong an imagination to be a brave man.

"Very well, Mr. Warren. I shall see you out. Then I am coming back to get him."

I was relieved to hear him say it. He opened the door, and we stepped out. As I surmised, it led into the main part of the building. I even thought that I recognized the room when we entered. It had the quiet softness that I had always noted in the library. It was one of the rest-rooms adjacent. Wilkins understood it as well as myself.

"Well, I guess we are safe now. I will turn you over to the Master."

He turned the knob of the door that led into the next room. It also was a rest-room. It contained a heavy, cloth-covered table, chairs and a carpet. At the table were two figures. We both of us drew back aghast.

It was this one that we had been pursuing! It was the Thing of Evil! And it was sitting at the table opposite the Master.

I don't know how long we stood there. I was too afraid, Wilkins too full of wonder. And I don't remember much more, unless it was Wilkins' very slangy expression:

"Well, well," he said, "wouldn't it get your goat!"

(To Be Concluded in Next Month's Issue)

To A Comet

MYSTERIOUS traveler of the skies,
That to the searching glass appears
A wisp of light among the stars,
Where hast thou been these many years?

Yon graybeard there who totters by—
Perchance he saw thee, when a lad.
Art thou a harbinger of war?
Dost come a portent good or bad?

How long upon thy lonely way
Hast thou been journeying? Was the earth
A formless waste in darkness girt,
And void, when thou didst have thy birth?

Canst tell us aught of heavenly things?
Is there a home beyond the stars?
Didst hear the choir of angels sing
When Christ was born? Have Venus, Mars,

And distant Neptune life and love
And joy and sorrow, dost thou know?
Doth God direct thy endless course
As centuries come and ages go?

Perhaps, when thou dost come again
The reign of peace will here prevail;
Mayhap beneath the light and truth
The powers of darkness then shall fail.

Man's inhumanity to man,
His petty pride and soulless greed,
Shall yield contrite submission to
The precepts of a kindlier creed.

Mayst thou of good an omen be,
For man portend a better day,
When from this earth injustice, wrong,
And sordid strife shall pass away!

—*William Ross Lee*

More Comfortable Pleasure

LOOKING forward to the next issue of "Famous" we find on our schedule Charles Stilson's complete booklength novel, **"Minos of Sardanes,"** sequel to that great thriller out of the precious vein of golden fantasy, **"Polaris—of the Snows."**

When Polaris Janess returned to America with the beautiful girl he had won in the Greek kingdom of Sardanes, near the South Pole, you might have thought that he was content to sit down in peace and quietude, marry his American Rose and be content with his lot. That was his idea, too, until he learned that a great, impending cataclysm of nature threatened the whole Sardanian nation.

There was nothing to be done then, of course, but to say good-by to Rose, and with a powerful, speedy American cruiser attempt to save the people and help Minos, the new king of Sardanes, out of his great difficulties. *You will enjoy "Minos of Sardanes."*

And For Good Measure

WE SHALL add Murray Leinster's classic, **"The Mad Planet";** somewhat apropros to the times as to title, but wholly imaginative in a highly reasonable and logical way. The horrors of existence thirty-thousand years in the future, in an insect-dominated world, have been so well depicted in this story that it is the favorite of many dyed-in-the-wool fantastic fiction followers.

Try to picture an elephantine insect life incredibly further entrenched than man— But no matter how far your imagination takes you, you will still be wide of the mark. Gulliver's nor Munchausen's wildest flights of fancy never even approximated the weird wonders of an age so unthinkable, and yet Leinster's marvels, as recorded by the clever pen of this master of suspense and word-picturing, are reasonable because—they are happening all around us even now Set sail then, with Burl, down the river of a million perils, and earn a more than vicarious thrill in the company of a man whose life was just one adventure after another

And The Climax ! !

The last exciting installment of **INTO THE INFINITE** by Austin Hall, in which the mystery of the forbidding mansion, the angelic music, and the identities of the Thing of Evil and of the Rebel Soul himself, are solved in the midst of a battle of titanic wills.

The Readers' Viewpoint

Address comments to the Letter Editor, Famous Fantastic Mysteries,
280 Broadway, New York City.

SOMETHING WE CAN DO

Dear Editor:

I have been an avid reader of your Science Fiction magazines for many years and think they are great relaxation.

Lately, I have been sending all my Science Fiction magazines to a friend of mine in Australia, who is the Welfare Officer of a large squadron there and who is also a Science Fiction fan.

I am enclosing herewith a copy of a letter which I received yesterday from him.

What can you do about this?

Sincerely yours,
BERNARD SILVER.

c-o. F.F.M.
280 BROADWAY
NEW YORK

Dear Bernie:

Your fourth batch of magazines arrived safely in Australia yesterday and were very much appreciated. You will understand how much use they get when I say that I could use a thousand magazines a week. Whether it's a driver, or a pilot or a gunner or a cook or a clerk, magazines are what they all grab up, especially science fiction, when they can get them, for there are no American magazines on sale in Australia, and there are never enough to satisfy them from the very limited rations they get from the States.

I remember back in the States how I'd see battered magazines lying about. Not here. Once I have distributed them (I got 80 copies of the February 4th issue of the Saturday Evening Post yesterday) they are literally read into oblivion.

In order to get the circulation to the greatest number, when I receive your batch of magazines, I tear them up into separate parts, each containing a story, and pass them out.

With regards and best wishes to all the family,

Sincerely,
CAPT. NICHOLAS KANE.

AIR CORP HEADQUARTERS,
35th AIR BASE GROUP,
A. P. O. 922,
c-o. POSTMASTER,
SAN FRANCISCO, CAL.

Editor's Note: Copies of F.F.M. have been sent to Capt. Kane. How about readers sending some through the publisher?

ON "ELIXIR" AND "INFINITE"

It's been two years since I last wrote to F.F.M., and so first of all I want to congratulate you on your third birthday. In the three years of your existence you have done a great service for all lovers of fantasy and science-fiction. For this I wish to thank you from the bottom of my heart.

"The Elixir of Hate" by G. A. England is one of the finest stories you have yet published in F.F.M., but it is Hall's "Into the Infinite" for which I am especially grateful. In the first installment it shows promise of becoming one of the truly great novels of fantasy fiction. Up to now "The Blind Spot" has been my favorite closely followed by "The Dwellers in the Mirage" and "The Metal Monster." Whether or not they will still be my favorites depends on whether or not "Into the Infinite" lives up to expectations.

Why don't you put out a quarterly (large size) to give us more of the great Munsey classics? I'm sure such a magazine would sell.

I've noticed that the stories of such authors as Serviss, Garret Smith, and Flint, and Rousseau have been almost completely ignored although you've received innumerable requests for their works.

By the way, why have you delayed reprinting that novel which is probably the greatest and most popular of all of A. Merritt's wonderful stories, "The Ship of Ishtar"? This story, which was voted by *Argosy* readers in 1938 as the most popular of all *Argosy* stories (I believe), is certainly deserving of early republication.

A few other stories I'd like to request are England's "The Thing from Outside," and "The House of Transmutation;" Gardner's "The Human Zero," and Zagat's "Drink We Deep," which, although published only five years ago in *Argosy*, would certainly fit into F.F.M.

ARTHUR SAHA.
2828½ THIRD AVE. E,
HIBBING, MINN.

Editor's Note: Many of the authors mentioned will appear very soon in F.F.M.'s pages.

ON MERRITT'S GENIUS

Since a good cover is the first thing you notice when you pick up a copy of F.F.M., I might as well start out with a few comments on that subject. The cover for the August issue is the most beautiful I have ever seen. A picture of haunting beauty more than fit for any art collection. It is such a shame that it is marred by printing. Otherwise I wouldn't hesitate to frame it and also many other F.F.M. covers, too. The cover for September was plenty good, but not Finlay's best.

Merritt's "Creep, Shadow!" was even better than his "Burn, Witch, Burn!" and the latter was an outstanding story.

Dahut—the White, the Shadow Queen! Only Merritt can take his characters and weave them through a combination of actual reality and dream-stuff to a climactic phantasmagoria that leaves the senses of the reader all aswirl. I derive unlimited pleasure from the morbid psychological impact of the sinister implications of unseen things that fringe upon the world of the commonplace, as tendered in his stories. I cannot say enough for Merritt.

Ray Cummings' novel in the September issue, "A Brand New World," was pretty fair science-fiction but not very fantastic. "The Horla," by Guy de Maupassant in the same issue was a nice little gem of fantasy.

The "Readers' Viewpoint" is very interesting, and I read every letter in that department. Which reminds me: I have a peeve against a guy whose letter appears in the September issue. Mr. Ben Indick states that he is not in favor of reprinting "The Conquest of the Moon Pool" complete in one issue because he always has issues of one to seven of F.F.M. on hand, therefore he can re-read the story any time he wants to. This seems to imply that he is the only reader of F.F.M. But I'll wager that there are many other readers, including myself, who haven't read the "Moon Pool" story and would like very much to do so.

F.F.M. has so imbued me with interest that I have tried my hand at writing fantasy. The result—here is a fantasy poem which I hope may be suitable enough to merit printing in your mag.

TONY RAINES.
c-o. J. W. GARRETT,
R. F. D. 1,
BRINKMAN, OKLA.

FROM ALIEN SPHERES

Out from darkest gulfs of interstellar abysses,
Frigid gusts of death-blown wind reach
With clammy hands, to encircle those who seek
Forbidden knowledge of unnameable things,
Drawing them into chaotic vortices
Of blackest night. Maddening diapasons ring,
Of utter despair, as in the nether-spheres
The dark gods entrap on some infinite plane
Their gibbering disciples, never more to smite human ears
With their darkness born obscenities.

Thus stands a primal warning of ominous portent,
To mortal who seeks that which is not to be told
From outer gods who strive to withhold
In their alien spheres, the knowledge of things
To which, once man has lent
His ear, he is drawn with ebon wings
Into fathomless regions to suffer the same frightful fate
As those leprous beings whose cries forever ring
Down timeless corridors, whose hunger, insatiate,
Entrapped them, as seekers of unholy secrets they were bent.

NEW FANTASY LEAGUE

This is to announce that our S F and Fantasy Fiction organization, formerly known as "Fifteen Followers of Fantasy Fiction," is now open to all fans residing in the state of Alabama, and will be henceforth known as the "Alabama Science-Fantasy League." Any 'Bama fans wishing to join should get in touch with me at the address given elsewhere in this letter.

In regard to the reprints in your magazine, we are 14 to 3 in favor of reprinting stories by E. R. Burroughs which have formerly appeared in Munsey publications.

Re: Second reprinting of "Conquest of Moon Pool."—We stand 16 to 1 *against* (and the one that's for it is a new arrival in the realm of fantasy and doesn't have the seven issues of F.F.M. in which "C.M.P." appeared.

Back to the Burroughs question: Sect. C. R. Stewart has compiled the following list of F.F.M. and F.N. readers who have stated that they would like to see reprints of Burroughs.

C. W. Wolfe, N. Mex., W. E. Bird, W., D. C., (Mrs.) Baetje, Ala., Frances Baetje, Ala., J. Daley, Pa., M. A. Bail, Minn., J. W. Forster, Wis., H. Morse, Iowa, J. Lewandowski, Ohio, R. V. Hunt, Colorado, L. Sinn, Rhode Island, R. H. Ryan, Mass., Joe Hensley, Ind., Elizabeth William, Calif., Arthur Saha, Minn., Dan Heilman, Ohio, Mary Conklin, Mich., S. E. Arguilla, Manila, P. I., P. H. Spencer, Conn.

BEN LUNA, JR.
(Pres.) Ala. S.-F. League.
401 E. MOBILE ST.,
FLORENCE, ALA.

NEW FAN MAG

Here in Chicago we are putting out a magazine called PARSEC—it's going to come out bi-monthly and will cost 10c a copy, or 3 for 25c. I am doing all art work; the mag has *two* planographed items in it, one is the cover which shows a scene from an article in the magazine, "Book of the Dead;" and the other is a letter-head which is used on the last page of the issue. Our policy is to feature 90 percent. articles; like book reports, movie reports (both old and new), and mainly other articles about Fantasy.

Any fiction we use will not be over three pages long and will be on the humorous side. Also we plan to have about two or three pages of ads alone; a sort of place where a fan can get books or magazines he wants at a fair price and still get them in nice condition. There will be 24 pages. If there are any fans living in Chicago who are really interested in the magazine, I wish they would get in touch with me. We need about two more fellows. (Members are: Bob Camden, Frank Robinson, Walt Liebsacher, Neil DeJack, Howard Funk—who is now in the Army, Paul Klingbiel—who has moved out of Chicago, and myself). If anybody thinks he would like to get an issue when it is complete—he can send me his address and I'll see that he gets one. (First issue is free.)

Now about your magazine: I would like to see you publish "The King of Conserve Island" and "The Planeteer" by Flint. I hear that they are swell stories. And how about some stories by Otis Adelbert Kline; his "Planet of Peril," "Prince of Peril," "Maza of the Moon" and "Thing of a Thousand Shapes"? Also don't you dare forget to include all of his Venus tales. What about "The Blue Barbarians?" I forget who the author is. And of course "Ship of Ishtar" by Merritt.

I think you can pick out the type of stories readers would like; just be careful not to give us the same type of story in each issue. Try to mix them up.

RONALD CLYNE.

2112 AINSLEE,
CHICAGO, ILL.

FINLAY AND PAUL OKEY

I would like to congratulate you on your fine Sept. issue. It was superb. Your mag. is in a class all its own. I hope your coming issues are as good as this one was. I guess I'd better get down to the business at hand. I'll start off with your artwork. Finlay did his usual excellent cover and inside pics. Paul's style of artwork was equally as good. Finlay and Paul are really artists. I'm sure I'll never tire of seeing their work.

"A Brand New World" was grand even though it was a little drawn out. "Wild Wullie the Waster"!! Aahhhh, Science Fiction paradise at last. It was as stated, a Different story. I enjoyed reading every word of it. I also like your Readers' Viewpoint.

RICHARD S. HIRSCHFELD.

836 WASHINGTON ST.,
HOLLISTER, CALIF.

ONE OF OUR FIRST ADMIRERS

After a long period of silence I want to assure you of my continued satisfaction with FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES. Since it has gone monthly again, you have left little to be asked for. The stories are excellent and the format is superb. Keep Virgil Finlay on the covers and continue to use him inside wherever you can. Paul is good inside too. Personally, I think it would cheapen F.F.M. to permit any of the other current science fiction or fantasy artists to draw for you. However, if you ever get around to running any of Burroughs' stories, I would like to see J. Allen St. John illustrate them, perhaps for sentimental reasons.

Someone made an excellent suggestion about the next reprinting of the Moon Pool stories. Put them into a special edition and let them be bought by mail, or award them as a subscription prize, or something, but save the regular issues for the stories which have not yet been reprinted.

Your choice of stories is all one could ask for. Keep them coming as well and I'll be pleased, although I do think you are about due for a story by Homer Eon Flint.

CHAS. W. WOLFE.

821 LINCOLN AVE.,
LAS VEGAS, NEW MEXICO

VERSES WANTED!

I am preparing to issue an anthology of swf verse—swf meaning science-weird-fantasy—and I hope those of your readers who write this kind of verse will submit poems.

The book will be mimeographed in approximate 8 by 5 format, the number of pages depending upon volume of acceptable contributions sent in. The project is entirely a labor of love, and poems will not be paid for, but each contributor will receive a copy of the book, each contributor that is of accepted verse. Just when the volume will be ready for distribution cannot be exactly determined at present, but the tentative date is late November or early December, depending to some extent upon factors byond the control of ye publisher.

Previously unprinted poems or verse that has been printed, is all right to submit, but if the poems have been printed, please be sure to include name and address of publication printing them, so necessary copyright permission can be obtained. And please include return postage when submitting poems. Contributions that are found to be unusable will be returned, but unless such are accompanied by return postage, no guarantees of return can be given.

The support of swf poetdom is solicited, and will be appreciated.

S. A. MCELFRESH.

317 CEDAR ST.,
LEXINGTON, KY.

MERRITT AND FINLAY TOPS

I thought the old FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES was good, but, after seeing the new setup I am astounded at the complete new vista of improvement. It is as if the magazine were rejuvenated with the life of eternal youth.

In my firm opinion, the same which is held by many others, Virgil Finlay is undoubtedly the best Fantasy artist of the 20th Century. His works will remain an immortal impression on the era of Fantasy—as long as a thought of it shall live. If anyone knows where to get Finlay originals, please contact me, if for sale.

A. Merritt is another name which will remain immortal in the realm of Fantasy. The combination of Merritt and Finlay can't be beat, no matter how wide the search may be for a comparison.

In all, I cannot find praise enough to completely encompass my feeling on the merits of FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES. So, in the best way I can express it, I will say, "Simply swellegent." Let's have more and more of it.

JOHN MEYER CUNNINGHAM.

2050 GILBERT ST.,
BEAUMONT, TEXAS

"SHIP OF ISHTAR" REQUESTED

"Creep, Shadow!" was much better than I expected, which is saying something. I rank it as one of Merritt's five best stories. I was

just a little disappointed in the interiors—not that they were bad, far from it. They were excellent, but slightly below Finlay's standard.

The other illustrations were well up to Paul's best standard.

And ah—the cover! Words fail me. If Finlay continues to improve I wonder what great heights he can reach? The fish was quite pretty. The face bears a strange resemblance to that of his Snake Mother, but is much more smoothly done.

Bring on "Ship of Ishtar." It's really a honey. The most immediate demand, I think, is for "Into the Infinite." After that, how about Slater La Master's "Phantom of the Rainbow," Flint's "The Planeteer," or "The Queen of Life," England's "The Golden Blight" and Garret Smith's "After a Million Years" or "Treasures of Tantalus"?

In closing, a final plea for "The Moon Pool" and sequel in one book.

Best wishes for continued success.

TOM WRIGHT.

3618 MAPLE AVE.,
OAKLAND, CALIF.

HE LENT US A STORY

The "King in Yellow" volume arrived safely back to me. Glad the editors found one of the tales worth reprinting; I certainly hope you are able to obtain permission of the Chambers' estate to use "The Demoiselle d'Ys." I feel sure many of the readers will find enjoyment in that little story. It has always been one of my favorites.

I had hoped that by this time several of my William Hope Hodgson's books would have been in your hands; but unfortunately they are still "on loan." I expect to have them back shortly, and then will either send or bring them down to you.

I spent a very enjoyable evening re-reading "Creep, Shadow!" in the last issue of F.F.M. It was good to see so many of Finlay's illustrations.

H. C. KOENIG.

c/o F.F.M.
280 BROADWAY,
N. Y.

Editor's Note: Mr. Koenig lent the volume of "The King in Yellow" by Robert W. Chambers, from which we selected "The Demoiselle d'Ys" used in the November issue.

BACK ISSUES WANTED?

The main reason I am writing this time concerns my fellow readers of this paragon of magazines, who seem to be in need of a helping hand or two, judging by their letters in the Readers' Viewpoint.

They seem to be constantly perplexed, often futilely it seems, about where and how to get back issues of magazines (F.F.M. and F.N. of course!), and fantasy and science-fiction books.

I can supply many of these. Please send 3c stamp in making requests.

You know, it isn't necessary this time for me to make a great deal of comment on the magazine in general. Why? A superb letter by Mr. Tony Raines in the Sept. Viewpoints, expresses my sentiments to a T. Also, a fine letter by a fellow-woman, Miss Abernathy. Odd how much two people can think alike, is it not?

I thoroughly approve of the Poet's Corner idea advanced by another reader. By all means, institute one.

Being a Scotswoman, I was completely won by "Wild Wullie the Waster"! Swell! I really enjoyed "A Brand New World," though I lean more toward the Merritt type of tale. The Maupassant story was indeed a gem. How about some more like this?

The art? Finlay, wasn't it? 'Nuff said!!

Contentedly,

MRS. FRANK B. LAPI.

218-77TH ST.,
WOODCLIFF, N. J.

CUMMINGS FIRST-RATE

First off, I wish to thank you for your kindness in printing my letter. My name, however, is CHAD, not "CERAD" as you stated.

As for the September issue, I consider it to be one of the finest you have yet put out. "A Brand New World" is truly worth the title of "Classic." Mr. Cummings put a wealth of detail into his descriptions, and this, along with the clever plot and enjoyable style of writing, puts this tale on a par with the best you've published. Give us some more of Cummings in future issues.

Paul did a nice job on the lead novel, but I much prefer Virgil Finlay for the longer stories, and Paul for novelettes and short stories. Paul is much better on the cover than inside. So why not let him do the cover once in a while?

In future issues I would like to see Merritt's "Ship of Ishtar," Burroughs' Mars and Venus series, and H. P. Lovecraft's stories, especially "The Dunwich Horror." And, of course, keep Merritt coming in regular doses.

Of the six issues I've read, I think "Creep, Shadow!" was by far the best, with Cummings' novel in Sept. issue in second place. The worst was "Polaris—of the Snows," and even this was readable.

Your magazine is well nigh perfect, so just keep on in the future as you have in the past.

A confirmed reader,

CHAD OLIVER.

3956 LEDGEWOOD,
CINCINNATI, OHIO

PERFECTION!

Paul is perfect! Finlay's fine. Cumming's comes through; Robbins is riotous.

Pictorial poem: perfect!

Wanted: "The Planeteer."

An "Ark of Fire Bug," too,

W. BELI

OAKLAND, CALIF.

"WILD WULLIE" WELL LIKED

You have done three things with F.F.M. which I had thought almost impossible in the fantasy magazine field. First, you have continuously presented only the best of stories since your inaugural issue of F.F.M., never having fallen down from your high story standard at any time. Of course, you give us only reprints, and select said reprints from the best fantasies ever published in the Munsey Magazines. Naturally, under such conditions, it is almost impossible to pick a poor story; but still, it's quite a feat to publish a magazine that the readers know will always be entertaining. .

Second, F.F.M. has gone monthly, and has more pages than ever before. This would not ordinarily be particularly remarkable, but with world conditions as they are at present, and with more and more magazines dropping their page quotas and becoming bi-monthlies and even quarterlies, doing as you have done with F.F.M. is truly a remarkable feat. . . .

Third, you have consistently given the fans the best of illustrations by the most talented artists in the field. With practically no story expenses to speak of, I imagine most of the proceeds go to the illustrators, which is all very well, since such stories as you publish deserve only the best of art work. . . . But the real cause of my writing this is Finlay's beautiful picture on page 113 of the Sept. issue of F.F.M. At last you've done it! Brought back those marvelous Finlay poetry illustrations, which I thought were denied us fans forever when Finlay left Weird Tales three years ago.

Such pictures allow Mr. Finlay his full imaginary scope, give him a chance to give his talent full rein—and give the fans an extra thrill every issue. What I consider his best picture was created during his poetry series in Weird Tales, and he's sure to turn out some super work if you allow him to continue. Don't drop this feature for anything. . .

The stories for Sept. were all up to par, with Robbin's "Wild Wullie, the Waster" far out ahead. I don't believe Robbins ever wrote a poor story in his life—all of his I've read have been extremely good. Cumming's "Brand New World," (which is the worst story title I've ever seen) is better than most Cummings yarns. I didn't care for it, but that's just because I'm prejudiced. England's translation of "The Horla" was interesting. You may put me down for wanting the republication of "The Moon Pool" and "The Conquest of the Moon Pool" in one volume. By using small print, this can easily be done, I think. By all means, use new illustrations, however. Well, that's all this time, but you can expect another epistle from me next month. Best wishes.

BILL BLACKBEARD.

216 ORCHID AVE.,
CORONA DEL MAR, CAL.

Editor's Note: We pay authors for the right considerable editorial expense.

NEW FAN MAG

After nearly a year of searching second hand stores and salvage shops, I am compelled to ask your help in locating a copy of Famous Fantastic Mysteries for August 1940. If any of your readers have a spare copy of this issue (containing "Darkness and Dawn" by George Allan England), I shall be glad to pay cash for it or give extremely good exchange out of my collection of bound volumes of travels and explorations (many of which have publication dates going back as far as 1750). Any help you can give me will be more than appreciated.

I also would be interested in trading for 1939 issues of Famous Fantastic Mysteries, certain numbers of the fan magazine "Fantasy Fan," and other items of fantasy and weird literature. Anything offered me must be in good, clean, unrumpled condition.

Another chap and myself are bringing out a one-issue fantasy amateur magazine, featuring articles, stories, and poems by H. P. Lovecraft and others; and as long as our limited issue lasts we will send a copy to any serious fan who writes us enclosing 3 cents postage. We hope to bring out a regular fan magazine after the war, and the object of the present issue is both to gain experience, and to make contacts with interested fans. Our magazine will feature a completely non-partisan editorial policy, so fans who are engaged in the various feuds and bickering probably won't be interested. As to content, our policy is two-fold: first, to publish items which though by top-flight name authors, are not commercial enough to go over with the general public; and second, to give developing young writers of fantasy a medium for their early work.

The only suggestion for F. F. M. I would have would be to publish an all-Lovecraft memorial issue, with illustrations by the inimitable Finlay—though most of us have Lovecraft's works, the Finlay illustrations would be enough to make us buy the stories over again. I also wish to mention the terrific "kicks" I got out of Cobb's "Fishhead" in a recent F.F.M. Very fine indeed!

FRANCIS T. LANEY.

720 TENTH ST.,
CLARKSTON, WASH.

ABOUT THE SERIAL

I have just started reading your fine magazine and I can't tell you how swell it is. It was those fine illustrations by Paul and Finlay that sold me your magazine, and combined with those great stories you print, it makes the best science-fiction magazine on the market.

I have finished the first part of "Into the Infinite" and am anxiously waiting for more.

CHARLES CRANE.

379 EASTERN PARKWAY,
BROOKLYN, N. Y.

TWO GREAT FANTASIES

The October issue of your magazine is one of the best you have produced. Your two feature stories were masterpieces of weird fiction. No one could ever forget "The Elixir of Hate." This story of the thoughts and actions of a man who underwent the marvelous adventures that Granville Dennison did will become, if it is not already, one of fantasy's greats. By reprinting these stories, you are helping fans who never would have access to it before, to recognize the "tops" in true fantasy.

"Into the Infinite" was written with Hall's gift of imagery, his wonderful similes and comparisons and a little more too. He seems to have an insight into human character, which though not exactly rare in authors, is very gratifying. This, with his picturization of the tale underneath, makes the story one which will hold you all the way through. Indeed, he compares with A. Merritt in this respect, which is a great honor in itself.

Let's have some more Finlay drawings in the next ish, however. I hope you never lose him.

I heartily agree with Saarela when he says, keep Burroughs out of F.F.M. However good he may be he will not please readers of your magazine.

DAVID MILLER.

306 COLLEGE ST.
VALDOSTA, GA.

"PRAISE SONGS" FOR F.F.M.

I have been reading this wonderful magazine for about a year now and thought it was about time to write in a few "praise songs" which I just thought up. Up until I found F.F.M. I had never been interested in the literature of the fantasy type but the Fantastic Novel, "Radio Beasts" made me a convert of your magazine and am I ever glad!

I used to bewail the fact that I didn't have the much talked about back issues but through a certain Mr. Roach of Chicago whose letter recently appeared in a publication herein I have been able to obtain all back issues with two exceptions at a price more than fair.

This magazine is the most striking on the newsstands due to the eye-catching sun-burst title and those beautiful cover illustrations by Finlay. You have the loveliest cover illustrations of *any* magazine on the market.

Every story that you have printed has given me enjoyment in some way. Some had good plots, others interesting character, lovely descriptive passages, etc. Each had some quality which made it outstanding in its field.

Looking over all the issues that I own of your magazine, F.F.M. and F.N., (27 issues) I can see that you have improved a *great* deal.

Your drawings for the stories are the best possible. I think Finlay and Paul are tops. However, for more variation you should use other artists such as Bok (I want to see more of his work in your magazine) and J. Allan St. John.

I think "Moon Pool" and "Conquest of the Moon Pool" should be printed complete but not in a regular issue because it wouldn't be fair to deprive us of a story not yet published.

"The Skylark" series by Smith belong in this type of magazine and should be printed herein.

At present I haven't caught up on the back-issue reading which I recently obtained but those that I have read so far rank as follows: I call them the Big Ten.

1. "The Blind Spot" and "The Spot of Life"
2. "The Face in the Abyss" and "The Snake Mother"
3. "Darkness and Dawn Trilogy"
4. "The Moon Pool" and "Conquest of the Moon Pool"
5. "The Citadel of Fear"
6. "The Radio Man" Trilogy
7. "Polaris of the Snows"
8. "The Metal Monster"
9. "A Brand New World"
10. "Burn, Witch, Burn!"

Your best author is Austin Hall. He's superb!

This magazine has had some lovely covers, the loveliest being, 1. Burn, Witch, Burn, 2. Polaris of the Snows, 3. Citadel of Fear, 4. The Snake Mother, 5. Palos of the Dog Star Pack.

I am looking forward to reading the following stories in this publication in the near future "Minos of Sardanes," "Polaris and the Goddess Glorian," rest of the "Palos" trilogy, "Jan of the Jungle," "The Man Who Mastered Time," "Princess of the Atom," "Ark of Fire," "Ship of Ishtar," "The Golden Blight," "After A Million Years," and "Seven Footprints to Satan." I wonder if they are all on your "to-be published" list.

I have a suggestion to make regarding the popularity of stories. I think it would be a grand idea to pick out the ten best stories that have appeared in F.F.M. and F.N. You can base your decision on the letters that are always sent in by the readers.

By the way, I forgot to mention the fact that the black background makes the cover far more attractive.

I haven't read the October issue as yet but the cover is great and so is that Finlay drawing on page 85. I prefer this method of drawing rather than the work done for "Creep, Shadow!" Although they make for a pleasant variation.

Until the next time, I remain,

RAYMOND GRUMBO.

ST. VINCENT, MINN.

N. Y. CITY SPEAKS

I have just read Cummings "Brand New World" and think it very good. In fact one of your best. Please reprint Merritt's "Ship of Ishtar," and "Seven Footprints to Satan."

ELI NEIMAN

180 EAST SECOND ST.,
NEW YORK, N. Y.

WANTS SEQUELS SOON

I have just finished your July issue. "Polaris of the Snows" in my opinion was just about tops. I didn't care so much for "Serapion" but it still was a nice piece of writing. I enjoyed Stevens' "Citadel of Fear" much more.

Thanks for going monthly and with trimmed edges too!!

Your mag now tops the Fantasy fiction field. How about finishing the Palos and Polaris trilogies before starting another?

A reprint I would welcome very much is the two Moon Pool stories. I missed them. Please print them in one issue! How about "Ship of Ishtar" soon? I would like to see E. R. Burroughs represented in your pages if possible.

Your art work is tops. You may add this new artist, Magrarian, if you wish.

Thanks for the best in the field.

LAURENCE "P." WILSON.

608 MALVERN ST.,
MIDDLETOWN, OHIO

OLD FAVORITES

I have only lately begun to read F.F.M., although I have read the old Argosy and All-Story for years and continued to read them until the All-Story was combined with "Cavalier."

I agree with Mr. Stoy of Jamaica, N. Y. that I would like to see a reprint of "Moon Pool." Also a reprint of a story that ran in the old Argosy during the fall of 1912. "The Island of Lost Souls" I believe the name of it was, although that's thirty years ago. I still remember how we all waited for the magazine to hit the stands. We always bought 3 copies because some of us couldn't wait till the other finished.

I enjoy every minute of F.F.M. and I read 22 magazines a month, not including novels from the library.

In the past few years so many of my favorite magazines like the old "Munseys" have gone out of print.

MRS. CLYDE C. COLE.

BOX 272,
BRIGHTON, IOWA

F.F.M.'S FOR SALE?

Please print in the correspondence corner that I wish to buy fantasy books and mags that were printed before March, 1941. I especially wish Merritt and Lovecraft stories.

MRS. R. L. SHAFFER.

2833 FREDERICK AVE.
BALTIMORE, MD.

BURROUGHS WANTED

I started reading your magazine about three years ago; the story, I think, was the first of the "Radio Man" trilogy and I was not very interested in it. I didn't read any of your stories for a year, then at a friend's house I picked up the first of the England trilogy, after that I was convinced that I should read F.F.M., now I think I can make some sensible comments about your magazine.

I know that Merritt is probably the best writer of fantasy but there are other very good writers also, some who never appear in your magazine. Burroughs' "The Monster Men" is a very good science fiction story and most of Sax Rohmer's work could be classed as fantasy and a little known writer, Frank Owen, has done some very beautiful work. I am glad you put Cummings' "A Brand New World" in the Sept. issue. Keep Finlay illustrating whatever you print.

JOHN BRADFORD.

59-35 69TH AVE.
RIDGEWOOD, N. Y., L. I.

NEW READER

I've just read your Sept. issue, my first. It's undoubtedly the best fantasy mag on the market. The featured novel, "A Brand New World" by Cummings ranks first of course, but the novelet, "Wild Wullie, the Waster," and the short, "The Horla" were also very enjoyable. The illustrations seem to be the best I've seen anywhere!

I would like to see some of E. E. Smith's works printed in your magazine and also "The Ark of Fire" suggested by Raymond Washington, Jr.

GEORGE M. SPICKARD.

BOX 12, R. F. D. 1,
GLADEVILLE, TENN.

F.F.M. A COLLECTOR'S DREAM

Through the aid of Julius Unger I have become the proud owner of a complete file of F.F.M. and F.N. I am certainly most deeply grateful to him, and feel sure many other fans are also. The August and September issues of F.F.M. are the only ones I have read completely so naturally I can't make a report on which stories I liked most, but I will list the covers that are tops with me. Heading the list is the one for "The Face in the Abyss" which is truly the best I've seen by Finlay. "Burn, Witch, Burn!" is second, while the cover for "A Brand New World" comes in third. It's a toss-up between "Creep, Shadow" and "Polaris of the Snows" for fourth place. In the future please don't let Paul do any covers, for his work looks much better in black and white.

Though I have not read all the stories in my collection, I have read over the letters and have a few ideas concerning your future policy. When you reprint "Conquest of the Moon Pool" why not revive F.N. for that one issue? And use the original Finlay illustrations together with new ones at intervals of every four pages or so. You're a collector's dream as far as contents and cover are concerned.

Incidentally, do you know anyone who has Finlay originals who would be willing to part with them?

VIRGIL UTTER, JR.

1323 12TH ST.,
MODESTO, CALIF.

BREAKS 3 YEAR SILENCE

For three years I have been sitting back and noticing, just noticing. I find now that I cannot sit back any longer, I must reveal my inner thoughts and contemplations.

First: I'd like to extend my congratulations to you for having the best of the Science Fiction and Fantasy Magazines on the market. No matter what anyone else may say F.F.M. stands alone and is uncomparable with any other magazine now on the market. As my friend Bill Watson expresses it, it is "pure ecstasy" to curl up with an issue of F.F.M.

Second: The authors whom I wish to see more of, are; G. P. Serviss (po-ll-e-e-se, give us more of him. You're letting a great writer go to waste! Where are "A Columbus of Space," and "The Second Deluge"? Serviss soon, please.) A. Hall ("pure ecstasy"), H. E. Flint (superb), G. Smith (really wonderful), J. G. Frederick (very good), J. P. Marshall (how about the sequel to "The World in Balance", "Warriors of Space"?), A. Merritt of course.

Third: Here in chronological order are the stories that I have picked as the best in each issue from September '39 to December '40 (as to my likes of the '40 and '41 issues, they are forthcoming as soon as I compile them).

The following choices are of the stories complete in the issue. The serials were not included in the choices:

"The Moon Pool", A. Merritt; "The Moon Metal", G. P. Serviss; "Lord of Death", H. E. Flint; "On the Brink of 2000", G. Smith; "The Man Who Saved the Earth", A. Hall; "Planet Juggler", J. G. Frederick; "The Devil of the Western Sea", P. M. Fisher; "Three Lines of Old French," A. Merritt; "The Rebel Soul", A. Hall; "The Face in the Abyss", A. Merritt; "The Sun Makers", W. McMorrow; "The Other Man's Blood", R. Cummings. (Cummings' tale advances a theory which I have had for as long as I can remember! That we should both hold the same theory has greatly impressed me.)

I am interested to see what other readers think of my choices.

GORDON M. KULL.

1915 NINTH AVE.,
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIF.

APOLOGY

I would like to acknowledge all the letters I received in reply to mine that you published. And I also want you to publish this so the fans will know why they haven't been answered. I was in the hospital when I received the letters. When I came home they were lost in the shuffle. I guarantee that all who will write me again will receive prompt answers.

I want you to renew my subscription to start with the issue following "Creep, Shadow!"

Hoping the fans forgive me.

ESTHER ABERNATHY.

320 S. DESPLAINES ST.,
JOLIET, ILL.

Getting Up Nights Makes Many Feel Old

Do you feel older than you are or suffer from Getting Up Nights, Backache, Nervousness, Leg Pains, Dizziness, Swollen Ankles, Rheumatic Pains, Burning, scanty or frequent passages? If so, remember that your Kidneys are vital to your health and that these symptoms may be due to non-organic and non-systemic Kidney and Bladder troubles—in such cases Cystex (a physician's prescription) usually gives prompt and joyous relief by helping the Kidneys flush out poisonous excess acids and wastes. You have everything to gain and nothing to lose in trying Cystex. An iron-clad guarantee assures a refund of your money on return of empty package unless fully satisfied. Don't delay. Get Cystex (Siss-tex) from your druggist today. Only 35c.

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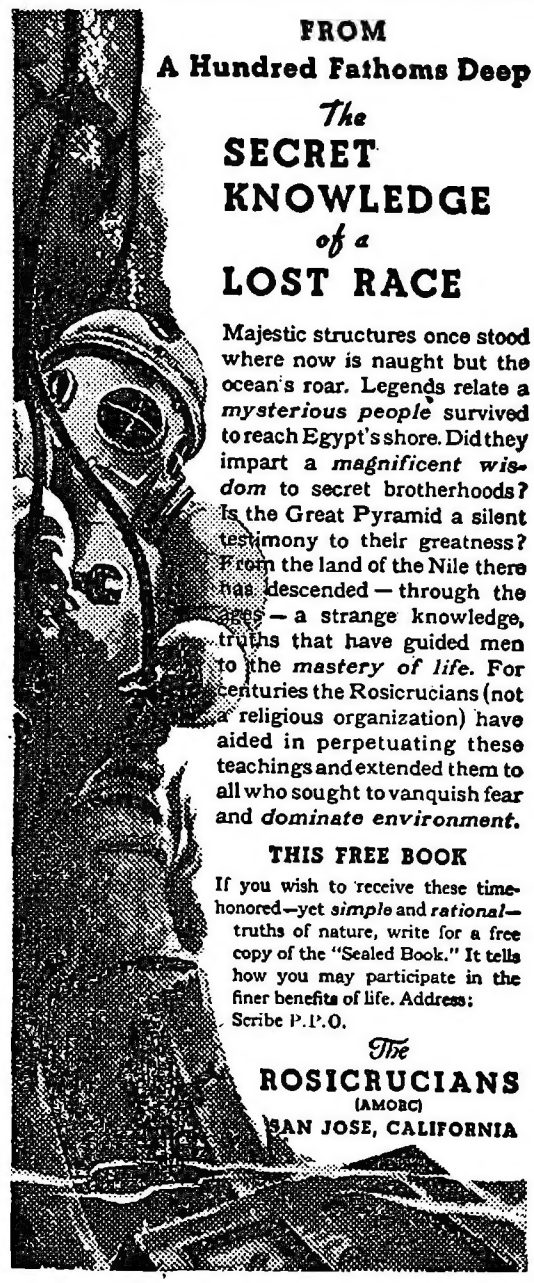

FROM
A Hundred Fathoms Deep
The
SECRET
KNOWLEDGE
of a
LOST RACE

Majestic structures once stood where now is naught but the ocean's roar. Legends relate a *mysterious people* survived to reach Egypt's shore. Did they impart a *magnificent wisdom* to secret brotherhoods? Is the Great Pyramid a silent testimony to their greatness? From the land of the Nile there has descended — through the ages — a strange knowledge, truths that have guided men to the *mastery of life.* For centuries the Rosicrucians (not a religious organization) have aided in perpetuating these teachings and extended them to all who sought to vanquish fear and *dominate environment.*

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99 W. Fern Street Philadelphia, Pa.

WHAT IS "FANTASTIC"?

This letter concerns the changes recently made in F.F.M. In general, I'd like to express great satisfaction.

Monthly publication is a boon, and coupled with trimmed edges, more pages, and more illustrations it certainly justifies the rise in price. The September number offers another of Finlay's wonderful illustrations taken from great poetry. By all means continue this famous series.

I've noticed recently that a number of readers have written in disparaging the use of science fiction in F.F.M. To my mind this is nonsense—most of your greatest stories were of this nature. The word "fantastic" in the title should be construed as generic, should it not? These readers seem, in fact, to have a very loose conception of the meaning of the phrase "science fiction," since they praise such stories as "The Radio Man" and "The Metal Monster."

Finlay's covers have for the most part been more than satisfactory, but how about some Paul covers for variety? Not drawings such as you formerly used, either, but *paintings*—those gorgeously colorful paintings which made Paul famous. Scenes on other planets, future cities, strange machinery, and so on—with Finlay doing the impressionistic, weird, and atmospheric type of thing.

Fantasy Fiction Field News has announced that you may reprint Burroughs' "The Moon Maid"; I've urged you before to do this, and should like to do so again.

PAUL SPENCER.

675 YALE STA.,
NEW HAVEN, CONN.

SEPT. HIGH RATING

I am christening two new societies! The name of one is S.F.M.C.B.P.O.F.F.M. Translated this means Society for More Covers by Paul on FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES. The other is: S.F.T.R.O.F.N. This translated means Society for the Reappearance of FANTASTIC NOVELS! I will probably be shot for even thinking of the latter, but I think many other readers will agree with me.

How about this, readers? Refer to the Sept. Ish of F.F.M. About an A-Minus rating. Refer to Finlay cover, A-Plus rating. Refer to stories: "A Brand New World"—B-Plus; "Wild Wullie, the Waster"—A-Plus; "The Horla"—A-Plus (Very intriguing story.) Refer to Finlay's pic on "Ariel"—A-Plus with a couple of stars.

Refer to F.F.M. over period of years. The best mag of imaginative fiction printed. It has the best artists, a good grade of paper and a moderate price, not to mention trimmed edges which are a boon to collectors.

EUGENE SETCHELL.

119 E. STATE ST.,
ALGOMA, IOWA.

How Do You Know You Can't Write?

Beginner Earns $1819.00

"Today I received a check for $165 for a story. Another I sold for $34. Not bad for a beginner, is it? The other day I counted up just how much I have made previously. It amounted to $1819.00." —*Mrs. L. L. Gray, 579 E. McHarg Ave., Stamford, Texas.*

Had Never Written a Line—Sells Article Before Completing Course

"Before completing the N.I.A. course, I sold a feature to Screenland Magazine for $50. That resulted in an immediate assignment to do another for the same magazine. After gaining confidence with successive feature stories, I am now working into the fiction field. Previous to enrolling in the N.I.A. I had never written a line for publication, nor seriously expected to do so."—*Gene E. Levant, 116 West Ave. 28, Los Angeles, Calif.*

Have you ever tried?

Have you ever attempted even the least bit of training, under competent guidance?

Or have you been sitting back, as it is so easy to do, waiting for the day to come when you will awaken, all of a sudden, to the discovery "I *am* a writer"?

If the latter course is the one of your choosing, you probably *never will write.* Lawyers must be law clerks. Doctors must be internes. Engineers must be draftsmen. We all know that, in our time, the egg does come before the chicken.

It is seldom that anyone becomes a writer until he (or she) has been writing for some time. That is why so many authors and writers spring up out of the newspaper business. The day-to-day necessity of writing—of gathering material about which to write—develops their talent, their insight, their background and their confidence as nothing else could.

That is why the Newspaper Institute of America bases its writing instruction on journalism—continuous writing—the training that has produced so many successful authors.

Learn to write by writing

NEWSPAPER Institute training is based on the New York Copy Desk Method. It starts and keeps you writing in your own home, on your own time. Week by week you receive actual assignments, just as if you were right at work on a great metropolitan daily. Your writing is *individually* corrected and constructively criticized. Thoroughly experienced, practical, active writers are responsible for this instruction. Under such sympathetic guidance, you will find that (instead of vainly trying to copy someone else's writing tricks), you are rapidly developing your own distinctive, self-flavored style—undergoing an experience that has a thrill to it and which at the same time develops in you the power to make your feelings articulate.

Many people who should be writing become awestruck by fabulous stories about millionaire authors and therefore give little thought to the $25, $50 and $100 or more that can often be earned for material that takes little time to write—stories, articles and business, hobbies, travels, sports news items, human interest stories, war work, etc.—things that can easily be turned out in leisure hours, and often on the impulse of the moment.

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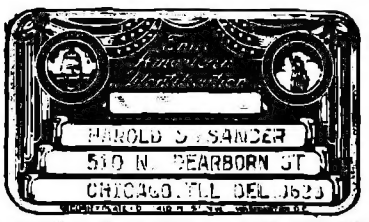

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